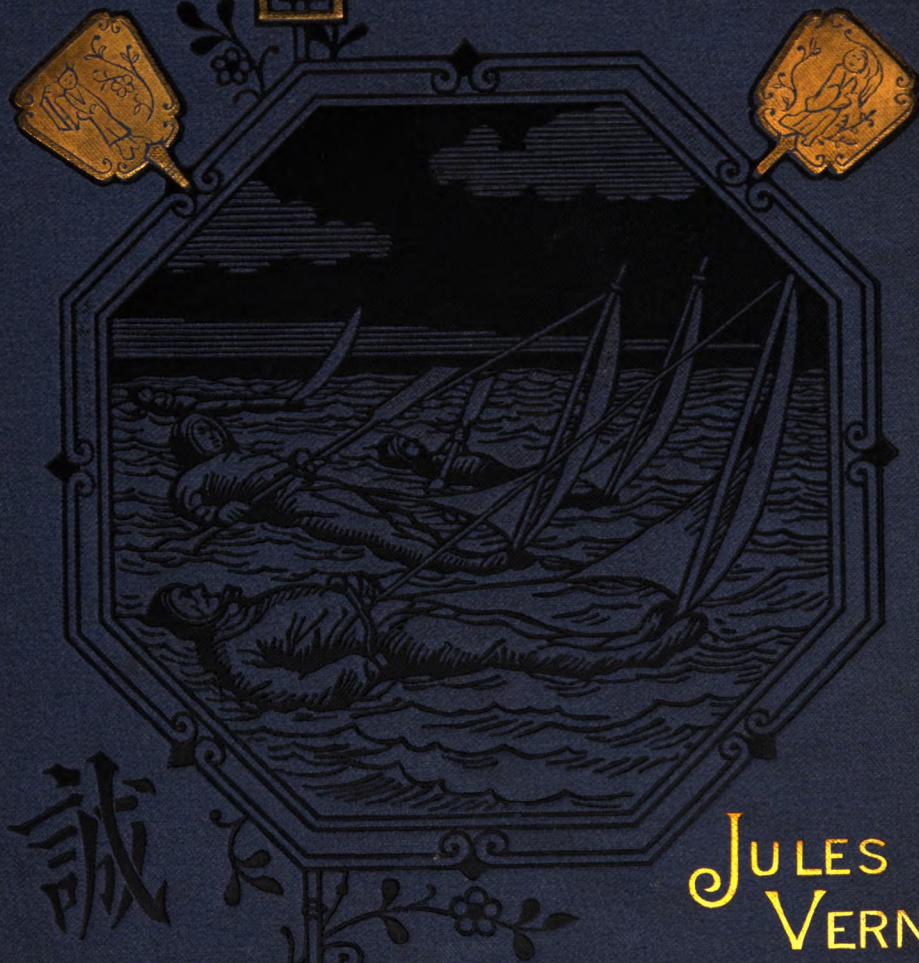

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THE TRIBULATIONS
OF A CHINAMAN





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THE TRIBULATIONS OF A
CHINAMAN.

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In the course of ten minutes they were able to steer with perfect ease and security.

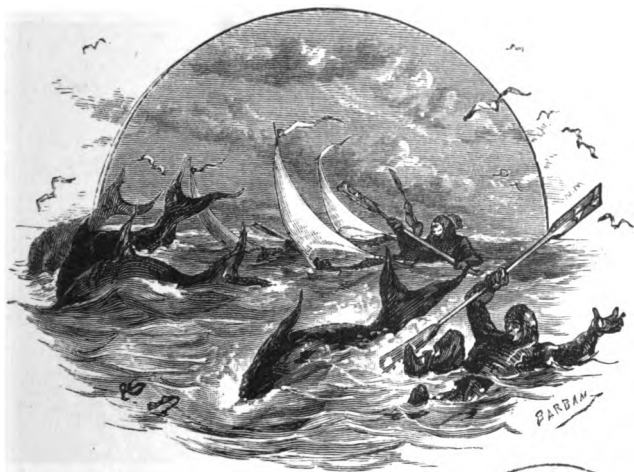
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THE TRIBULATIONS OF A CHINAMAN.

BY
JULES VERNE.

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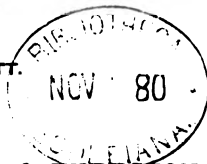
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THE TRIBULATIONS OF A CHINAMAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST WATCH OF THE NIGHT.

"THERE'S some good in life, after all!" exclaimed one of a party of six, as he rested his elbow upon the arm of a marble-backed seat, and nibbled a fragment of lotus-root.

"Yes, and evil too," replied another, recovering from a fit of coughing brought on by the pungency of a piece of shark's fin.

"Then be philosophers," said a man of more advanced years, who wore a pair of huge spectacles with wooden rims; "be philosophers, and take life as it comes; to-day you run the risk of being choked; to-morrow discomfort departs as easily as this wine. Such is life!"

And he swallowed a glass of lukewarm wine, drawn from a vessel whence the steam arose in a cloud that was scarcely perceptible.

"For my part," observed a fourth, "I find existence very

B

comfortable as long as there is plenty to live on and nothing to do."

"On the contrary," a fifth remarked, "true happiness consists in labour and study ; to get happiness you must get knowledge."

"And find out at last that you know nothing."

"Well, and isn't that the beginning of wisdom?"

"And what, then, is the end of it?"

"Wisdom has no end," said the gentleman in the spectacles ; "but there will be no want of contentment if only you possess common sense."

"And our host, what has he to say upon the subject? does he hold life to be a condition of good or a condition of evil?" said the first speaker, addressing the entertainer of the party, who occupied, as of right, the seat at the head of the table.

The host had been sitting silent and abstracted, carelessly biting some melon-pips, and taking no part in the discussion. Appealed to thus directly, he merely pouted and uttered a contemptuous "Pooh!"

Common to all languages, "pooh" is a little monosyllable that may convey a large amount of meaning. It was now the signal for a general outburst of argument between the five guests ; each more decidedly advanced his own theory, whilst all were unanimous in wishing to elicit their host's opinion on the matter.

For some time he declined to make any further reply ; but at length admitted that as far as he was concerned he found life neither particularly pleasant nor particularly unpleasant ; that he looked upon it as rather an insignificant institution, and that he hardly thought any very intense enjoyment was to be got out of it.

A perfect volley of surprise broke from the whole audience.

"Only hear him !" cried one.

"Listen to him, a man that had never a rose-leaf to disturb his ease !" cried another.

"And so young too !"

"Yes, young and healthy !"

"And rich to boot !"

"Ay, rich enough !"

"Perhaps a little too rich !"

Animated as this cross-fire was, it failed to call up the faintest semblance of a smile upon the impassive countenance of the host ; he only shrugged his shoulders with the air of a man who had scarcely glanced at the book of his experience, and who certainly was in no hurry to turn over its pages.

He was thirty-one years of age, in the possession of perfect health and an ample fortune : his mind had suffered from no lack of culture, and in general intelligence he was rather above the average. There seemed no reason why he should not be the happiest of mortals.

Presently the grave voice of the philosopher, like the voice of the leader of an ancient chorus, was heard above the tumult,—

“Young man, if you are not perfectly happy, it is because your happiness has always been of a negative character. In order to appreciate health and good fortune aright, it is necessary at some time or other to have been deprived of them. Now, you have never been ill; you have never known a misfortune; I repeat, therefore, that you are not capable of enjoying the blessings of which you are in possession.”

He filled a glass with sparkling champagne of a costly brand, and holding it up, continued,—

“My friends, let me propose a toast:—‘May some misfortune light upon our host—some little shadow settle on the brightness of his life!’”

The glasses of the company were drained. The host calmly made the least possible sign of acknowledgment, and relapsed into his normal apathy.

And where, it may now be asked, did this conversation take place? Was it in Paris, London, Vienna, or St. Petersburg? Was it in a restaurant of the Old World or the New that this little company was gathered, eating and drinking, genial yet without excess. One thing was altogether certain: it was not a party of Frenchmen, for not a word of politics had been spoken.



Comely girls did the waiting.

The apartment was moderate in size, but richly decorated. The rays of the setting sun glinted through panes of blue and orange glass ; beyond the bay-windows wreaths of flowers, real and artificial, waved in the evening breeze, while variegated lanterns mingled their pale light with the departing beams of day. The tops of the windows were ornamented with carved arabesques and varied sculpture representing the fauna and flora of a fantastic world ; hangings of silk and wide double-bevelled mirrors adorned the walls, and suspended from the ceiling a punkah with wings of painted muslin kept the air in motion and relieved the oppressiveness of the temperature.

The table was oblong in shape, and made of black lacquer ; its surface, uncovered by any table-cloth, reflected each separate article of porcelain or of silver as perfectly as if it had been a sheet of crystal.

As a substitute for table-napkins, every one was supplied with a considerable number of squares of paper figured over in various devices. The chairs arranged round the table were made with marble backs, as being more suitable to the climate than the padded lounges in general use elsewhere.

Comely girls did the waiting ; they wore lilies and chrysanthemums in their raven locks, and had bracelets of gold and jade coquettishly twisted on their arms. Sprightly and full of smiles, they dexterously took the dishes on and

off with one hand, leaving the other free to wave a graceful fan, in order to maintain the current of air that had been set in motion by the punkah above.

Nothing could be more perfect or served in better style than the entire banquet. The Bignon of the district, as if aware that he was catering for connoisseurs, seemed to have been anxious to surpass himself in the preparation of the many dishes that crowded the *menu*.

For the first course were handed sugared cakes, caviare, fried grasshoppers, dried fruits, and Ning-Po oysters. Then followed successively, at short intervals, ducks', pigeons', and peewits' eggs poached, swallows' nests with mashed eggs, fricassees of ginseng, stewed sturgeons' gills, whales' sinews with sweet sauce, fresh-water tadpoles, fried crabs' spawn, sparrows' gizzards, sheeps' eyes stuffed with garlic, radishes in milk flavoured with apricot-kernels, matelotes of holithurias, bamboo-sprouts in syrup, and sweet salads. The last course consisted of pine-apples from Singapore, earth-nuts, salted almonds, savoury mangoes, the white fleshy fruits of the "long-yen," the pulpy fruits of the "lit-chee," chestnuts, and preserved oranges from Canton. For drinks, there were beer, wine from Chao-Chigne, and an ample supply of champagne. After the dessert, rice was served, which the guests raised to their mouths with little chop-sticks.

Three hours were spent over the banquet. When it was

ended, and at the time when, according to European usage, salvers of rose-water are frequently handed round, the waiting-maids brought napkins steeped in warm water, which all the company rubbed over their faces apparently with great satisfaction.

The next stage of the entertainment was an hour's lounge to be occupied in listening to music. A group of players and singers entered, all pretty young girls, neatly and modestly attired. Their performance, however, could scarcely have been more inharmonious ; it was hardly better than a series of yells, howls, and screeches, without rhythm and without time. The instruments were a worthy accompaniment to the chorus ; wretched violins, of which the strings kept entangling the bows ; harsh guitars covered with snake-skins ; shrill clarionets, and harmonicons all out of tune, like diminutive portable pianos.

The girls had been conducted into the room by a man who acted as leader of the Charivari. Having handed a programme to the host, and received in return a permission to perform what he chose, he made his orchestra strike up "The bouquet of ten flowers," a piece at that time enjoying a vast popularity in the fashionable world. This was followed by other pieces of similar character, and at the close of the performances, the troop, already handsomely paid, were enthusiastically applauded, and allowed to depart and gain fresh laurels from other audiences.

After the concert was over, the party rose from their seats, and, having interchanged a few ceremonious sentences, passed to another table. Here were laid six covered cups, each embossed with a portrait of Bôdhidharama, the celebrated Buddhist monk, standing on his legendary wheel. The cups were already full of boiling water, and each member of the party was provided with a pinch of tea, which he put into the cup, without sugar, and at once drank off the infusion. And what tea it was! Direct from the stores of Gibb, Gibb, and Co., there was no fear of its having been adulterated by extraneous matter, nor of its being coloured by turmeric or Prussian blue; no suspicion of its having already been subject to a process of decoction that left it only fit to lay upon the carpet of a dusty room; it was the Imperial tea, in all its purity, the young leaf-buds allowed to be gathered only by children with gloves on their hands, and that but rarely, as every gathering kills a tree.

Europeans would have exclaimed in wonder at its flavour, but these connoisseurs sipped it slowly, with the air of men who duly appreciated its quality. They were all men of the upper class, handsomely attired in "hun-chaols," a kind of thin shirt, "ma-cooals," or short tunics, and "haols," long coats buttoned at the side. On their feet were yellow slippers and open-work socks, met by silk breeches that were fastened round the waist by tasselled

scarves ; on their chests they wore a kind of stomacher elaborately embroidered in silk. Elegant fans dangled from their girdles.

To this description it must be superfluous to add that they were natives of the land where the tea-tree annually yields its fragrant harvest. To them the banquet, with its strange *menu* of swallows' nests, sharks' fins, and whale-sinew, had contained no novelty, much as they had been aware of the skill and delicacy with which everything had been served. But if there had been nothing to surprise them in the dishes of the entertainment, it was altogether the reverse when their host informed them that he had a communication that he wished to make.

The cups were all refilled, and, raising his own towards his lips, resting his elbow on the table, and fixing his eyes on vacancy, the host began to speak.

"Do not laugh at me, my friends, but I am going to introduce a new element into my life. Whether it will be for good or for evil, only the future can decide. This dinner, at which you give me the pleasure of your company, will be the last in which I shall entertain you as a bachelor. In another fortnight I shall be married !"

"Married and happy ! the happiest of men !" broke in the voice of the one who seemed to be the optimist of the party. "See," he added, "the omens are all in your favour," and he pointed out how the lamps were shedding

a clear pale light, how the magpies were chattering cheerily on the carved windows, and how the tea-leaves were all floating perpendicularly in the cups.

A volley of congratulations followed, but the host received them all with the most imperturbable coolness. It did not seem to occur to him that it was necessary to give the name of the lady, and no one ventured to intrude upon his reserve. The philosophic gentleman alone did not join in the general chorus of good wishes, but, sitting with his arms folded, his eyes half closed, and an ironical smile upon his lip, seemed as if he had some misgiving as to the propriety of the compliments that were being so freely paid.

The host looked at him ; rising from his seat and approaching him, he said, with a voice that betrayed more emotion than his previous manner indicated,—

“Do you think I am too old to get married ?”

“No.”

“Too young, then ?”

“No.”

“Am I making a mistake ?”

“Very probably.”

“The lady, you know, possesses every quality to make me happy.”

“Very true.”

“Then where is the difficulty ?”

“The difficulty is in yourself.”

"Shall I never be happy?"

"Never till you have known what it is to be unhappy."

"I am out of the reach of misfortune."

"Then your case has no remedy."

"Nonsense! all nonsense!" broke in the youngest man in the room; "it is all idle trash listening to a theoretical machine like this philosopher! He is full of theories, and his theories are bosh! Get married, my friend; get married as soon as you can. I should get married myself, only I have a vow which forbids me. We will drink your health. Happiness and good luck be with you!"

"I can only repeat my hope," rejoined the stoic, "that happiness may come to him through some unhappiness."

The toast was drunk; the guests rose from their seats, clenched their fists as if they were about to begin a boxing-match, lifted them to their foreheads, bowed, and took their leave.

From the description thus given of the apartment where the entertainment was held, of the strange *menu*, and of the attire and deportment of the company, it will be at once comprehended that the Chinese here depicted were not of that conventional type which might step out from paper screens or from old oriental porcelain, but, on the other hand, were examples of the modern inhabitants of the Celestial Empire, who, by education, travel, and intercourse with Europeans, have adopted not a few of the

habits of the civilized West. It was, in fact, in the saloon of one of the pleasure-yachts on the Pearl River at Canton that the wealthy Kin-Fo, with his inseparable companion, Wang the philosopher, had just been entertaining four of the earliest friends of his youth, Pao-shen, a mandarin of the fourth class, as his dark blue ball denoted, Yin-Pang, a rich silk merchant in Apothecary Street, Tim, a mere man of pleasure, and Hooal, a man of letters.

Thus, on the twenty-seventh day of the fourth moon, had been passed the first of the five watches into which the Chinese romantically divide the night.

CHAPTER II.

ANTECEDENTS.

KIN-FO had a special reason for giving a farewell dinner at Canton. Having spent the greater part of his youth in the capital of Quang-Tung, he had, as a rich and generous young man, formed many friends there, and was anxious to pay them a compliment on this occasion. But nearly all of them had been dispersed on their various paths of life, and only the four already mentioned remained to accept the courteous invitation. Kin-Fo's proper residence was at Shang-Hai ; he had merely come to Canton for a few days' change of air and scene, and was about, that very evening, to take the steamboat that called at the principal ports along the coasts, and to return to his "yamen."

As a matter of course, Wang the philosopher had accompanied him ; he was a tutor who rarely quitted his pupil's side. Tim had not been very much beside the mark when he irreverently called him "a theoretical machine," for he

was never weary of propounding his sententious maxims, although it must be owned that they ordinarily had as little effect upon Kin-Fo as is proverbially represented by water on a duck's back.

Kin-Fo was a very fair type of the Chinese of the North, who have never become allied with the Tartars. Neither his father's family nor his mother's had a drop of Tartar blood in their veins, and for purity of breed his match could not be found anywhere in the southern provinces, where both upper and lower classes have intermingled with the Manchow race. He was tall and well-built; his complexion was fair rather than yellow; his eyes and eyebrows were set almost horizontally, although they turned up slightly towards the temples; his nose was straight, and altogether his physiognomy was so refined that he could hardly have passed unnoticed even among the handsome men of the well-favoured populations of the west. The Chinese characteristic that was most pronounced was his closely shorn head and neck, with the magnificent pigtail that descended from his poll like a serpent of glossy jet. A fine moustache grew in a graceful semicircle over his upper lip, distinct as the sign that in musical notation denotes a pause. His nails were allowed to grow to the length of half an inch, delivering their testimony to the fact that he belonged to the class who never put their hands to manual labour of any kind; but any how his



Kin-Fo.

personal bearing was sufficient to show his independent position in life.

He had been born in Peking, a birthplace in the north of which the Chinese are ever proud, and to which they refer by describing themselves as coming "from above." Here he had lived until he was six years old, when his residence had been changed to Shang-Hai.

His father, Chung-How, was a descendant of a good family in the north, and, like many of his countrymen, possessed a remarkable faculty for business. In the early part of his career there was hardly a product of that rich and populous territory that did not enter into his line of traffic, and paper from Swatow, silk from Soo-Choo, candied sugar from Formosa, tea from Han-Kow and Foo-Chow, iron from Honan, copper and brass from the province of Yunnan—all were included in the items of his commerce. His principal factory, or "kong," was at Shang-Hai, but he had other establishments at Nan-King, Tien-Tsin, Macao, and Hong-Kong. English steamers transported his merchandise, the electric cable kept him informed of the market price of silk at Lyons and of opium at Calcutta; for, unlike the generality of Chinese dealers who were under the pressure of the government or the influence of mandarins, he rose superior to prejudice, and so far from scorning the aid of steam and electricity, he welcomed them readily as efficient agents of progress.

So successfully did Chung-How carry on his transactions, not only within the empire itself but likewise with the French, English, Portuguese and American firms at Shang-Hai, Macao, and Hong-Kong, that at the time when his son Kin-Fo was born, he had already amassed the sum of 400,000 dollars (80,000*l.*). But in subsequent years this fortune was more than doubled by the opening of a new line of business in the export of coolies to America.

It is a fact established beyond dispute that the population of China (variously designated by the poetical appellations of the Celestial Empire, the Central Empire, and the Land of Flowers), is quite disproportionate even to the vast extent of territory it occupies, and cannot be estimated at less than 360,000,000 souls, or about a third of the entire population of the world. Although the needs of a poor Chinaman are marvellously small, yet he must live; and China, notwithstanding its innumerable rice-plantations and its boundless fields of corn and millet, is incapable of growing sufficient produce to maintain him; there is a vast overplus of people; and for this overplus a way of escape may be said to have been opened by the breaches made by French and English cannon in the moral no less than the material walls of the Celestial Empire.

It was towards North America, and especially towards California, that the stream of emigration rapidly flowed

forth; and so violent was the flood that Congress was driven to take measures to restrict what was somewhat uncourteously designated as the invasion of the "yellow plague;" it was soon discovered that although the exodus of 50,000,000 emigrants would not very sensibly affect the Chinese Empire, the settlement of so large a contingent of Mongolians upon American soil threatened only too seriously to result in the absorption of the Anglo-Saxon element in the community.

Nevertheless, in defiance of all effort to establish restrictions, emigration continued to go on. The coolies, handy at all trades, and contented with a handful of rice, a cup of tea, and a little tobacco for their daily rations, did thoroughly well in California, Oregon, Virginia, and at Salt Lake, bringing with them everywhere a very considerable reduction in the wages of handicraft. Companies were started for their transport; five in various parts of China for their conveyance to America, and another at San Francisco to receive them on their arrival. A subordinate agency was likewise established, called Ting-Tong, which undertook to bring them back again.

The necessity for this Ting-Tong was imperative. Although the Chinese were ready enough to go and seek their fortune among the "Mellicans," as they called the people of the United States, it was always upon the rigid condition that die when they might, their bodies should

not fail to be brought back and buried in their native land. Except under a special covenant to this effect, no contract could ever be made between an emigrant and a company; and this "Death-agency" accordingly was set on foot to provide the means of conveyance for corpses from California to Shang-Hai, Hong-Kong or Tien-Tsin.

Among the first to foresee the lucrative character of this new branch of business was the enterprising Chung-How. He entered upon it with great zest, and when he died, in 1866, he was a director of the Quang-Tung Company in the province of that name, besides being sub-director of the Ting-Tong board at San Francisco.

So successful were Chung-How's speculations, that Kin-Fo at his father's death found himself heir to a fortune of 160,000 L ., nearly all invested in the Central Bank of California, where he had the good sense to leave it. Only nineteen years of age, without father and without mother, he would have been alone in the world had it not been for the society of his inseparable friend and mentor, Wang. For seventeen years had Wang resided in the yamen at Shang-Hai, the cherished companion alike of father and son; whither he had come and what were his antecedents probably none but Chung-How and Kin-Fo could tell, and even they would doubtless maintain a strict reserve upon the subject. It may, however, be well slightly to lift the veil and just glance at his early history.

It is a recognized certainty that in China the spirit roused by an insurrection will live and linger for many years in the hearts of many thousand men. In the seventeenth century, the celebrated Ming dynasty of Chinese origin had exercised its sway for three hundred years, when, in 1644, the representative of the race, finding himself too weak to cope with the enemies that threatened his capital, called in the aid of a Tartar king. The Tartar, nothing loth, hastened to his assistance, subdued the insurrection, but immediately took advantage of his position to dethrone the suppliant, and caused his own son Chun-chee to be proclaimed Emperor of China.

Henceforward, the usurper held the power, and the Chinese throne was filled by Manchow Emperors. Little by little, amongst the lower classes of the population, the two races amalgamated, but amongst the richer families of the north the distinction between Chinese and Tartars was far more strictly maintained, and in some provinces even to the present day there are to be found those who have remained steadfast in their allegiance to the fallen dynasty.

Amongst these was Kin-Fo's father. Faithful to the traditions of his family, he would at any time have welcomed a revolt against the Tartar power, although for three centuries it had been dominant in the empire. His son, as might be expected, shared his political sentiments.

The reigning emperor in 1860 was Tsien-Fong, who declared war against France and England ; a war which was concluded by the treaty of Peking on the 25th of October, in the same year. But previously to that date the ruling dynasty had been threatened by a formidable insurrection. The Chang-Mow or Tai-Ping, the "long-haired-rebels," had captured Nanking in 1853, and two years afterwards had taken Shang-Hai. After Tsien-Fong's death, his young son and successor had a hard matter to hold his own against the Tai-Ping, and except for the assistance of the Viceroy Li, Prince Kong, and more especially of the English Colonel Gordon, the chances are very great that he would not have retained his throne. The object of the Tai-Ping, sworn enemies to the Tartars, was to overthrow the reigning Tsing dynasty, and to replace it once more by that of Wang ; their party was strongly organized, divided into four distinct bands ; the first, under a black banner commissioned for slaughter ; the second, under a red banner, set apart for incendiarism ; the third, under a yellow banner, appointed for plunder ; and the fourth, under a white banner, selected to superintend the commissariat of the other three.

Important military operations were carried on in the province of Kiang-Su. Soo-Choo and Kia-Hing, a few miles from Shang-Hai, fell into the hands of the insurgents, and were recaptured only after a severe struggle

by the Imperial troops. Shang-Hai itself was attacked on the 18th of August, 1860, at the very time when, further north, the united French and English army, under Generals Grant and Montauban respectively, was storming the forts of the Pei-Ho river. Chung-How was then occupying a residence near Shang-Hai, close to the magnificent bridge that had been constructed by Chinese engineers, over the river of Soo-Chow, and, as may be supposed, was watching the insurrection with no unfavourable eye.

On the evening of the 18th, just after the rebels had been expelled from the town, the door of the merchant's house was suddenly burst open, and a fugitive flung himself at the master's feet. He was entirely unarmed, and if Chung-How had been inclined to surrender him to the Imperial troops, his life would have been forfeited at once. But Chung-How had no disposition to betray a Tai-Ping; he hastily closed the door and addressed the intruder,—

“I know nothing of you. I do not inquire whence you have come, or what you have been doing. Here you may consider yourself as my guest. Here you shall be safe.”

Well-nigh exhausted as he was, the fugitive in broken sentences, began to pour forth his gratitude, but Chung-How checked him by asking,—

“What is your name?”

“Wang!” was the answer.

“Enough! enough!” said Chung-How; “I ask no more.”

Thus Wang's life was saved by an act which, had it been known, would doubtless have cost the blood of the benefactor.

In the course of the next few years, the rebellion was finally suppressed, and in 1864, the Tai-Ping Emperor, besieged in Nanking, poisoned himself, to avoid falling into the hands of the Imperialists.

From the hour of his rescue, Wang had remained under his deliverer's roof, no one ever venturing to question him about his past deeds. The atrocities committed by the rebels were said to have been very terrible, and perhaps it was better to be ignorant as to which of the four banners Wang had followed, or at least to cherish the belief that he had only served in the corps that provided for the victualling of the others.

But whatever the fact might be, it was anyhow certain that Wang had been fortunate enough to find most comfortable quarters, and had done his best to repay the generosity that had rescued him. So wise and so amiable a friend had he shown himself, that Kin-Fo, upon his father's death, had retained him as an inseparable companion for himself. In the staid moralist of fifty-five, the philosopher in wooden spectacles, with the conventional moustache, it would have been hard to recognize the Tai-Ping of former days, given perhaps to robbery, to incendiarism, or to murder ; with his long sober-coloured robe,



Wang.

with his figure slightly tending to *embonpoint*, and with his professional skull-cap of fur decorated, according to Imperial regulation, with tufts of red, he might easily have passed for a member of the confraternity versed in the eighty thousand symbols of the Chinese caligraphy, or for one of the first-class literates privileged to pass beneath the great gate of Peking reserved exclusively for "the sons of heaven." It is very likely that the rough nature of the rebel had been softened down by perpetual contact with Chung-How's frank and genial qualities, and that he had gradually subsided into the calm and gentle ways of speculative philosophy.

On the evening on which this story opens, and immediately after the farewell dinner was over, Kin-Fo and Wang together proceeded towards the quay to meet the steamer that was to convey them back to Shang-Hai. Kin-Fo was silent and thoughtful; Wang looked up and down, right and left; now at the moon, now at the stars, passing complacently through the gate of Perpetual Purity, with equal composure through the gate of Perpetual Joy, and underneath the shadow of the Pagoda of the Five Hundred Gods.

The "Perma" was just getting up her steam to start. Kin-Fo and Wang went to the cabins that had been reserved for them, and were soon traversing the waters of the Pearl River, the rapid stream which daily receives the

carcases of prisoners who have been executed. The steamer shot past the breaches that had been made by the French cannonade, past the Pagoda of Nine Stories and past the Jardyne Point in the neighbourhood of Whampoa, where larger ships are wont to anchor ; wending her way between the little islands and the stockaded banks, she made a hundred miles during the night, and at sunrise was passing "the Tiger's Jaw," and nearing the bars at the mouth of the estuary, while through the morning mist the Victoria peak of Hong-Kong, 1825 feet in height, was faintly visible.

The voyage was prosperous all through, and in due time Kin-Fo and his companion were safely landed at Shang-Hai, on the coast of the province of Kiang-Nan.

CHAPTER III.

SHANG-HAI.

THERE is a Chinese proverb to the effect that "when swords are rusty and spades bright, when prisons are empty and granaries full, when temple-steps are worn by the foot-prints of the faithful, and courts of justice are overgrown with grass, when doctors go on foot, and bakers on horse-back, then the Empire is justly governed." However true the proverb may ordinarily be, to no country in the world is it less applicable than to China, for there, on the contrary, swords are bright, while spades are rusty, the prisons are full to overflowing, while the granaries are empty, bakers rather than doctors starve, and though the pagodas may attract the believers, the halls of justice never lack their train of criminals.

An empire which extends over an area of 1,300,000 square miles, which is more than 1400 miles in length, and varies from 900 to 1300 miles in breadth, and which contains eighteen vast provinces, exclusive of the dependent

territories of Mongolia, Manchuria, Thibet, Tonquin, Corea, and the Loo-Choo Islands, can scarcely fail to have a very imperfect administration. The fact is quite evident to foreigners, and the Chinese themselves are beginning to have more than a suspicion of its truth. The emperor alone, "the son of heaven," the father of his people, who rarely emerges from the august seclusion of his palace, whose word is law, whose power over life and death is absolute, to whom the imperial revenues are due by right of birth, and before whom all foreheads are bowed low to the dust—he, indeed, may believe that he rules over the happiest of lands, and any attempt to undeceive him would be utterly vain; a "child of the skies" must be infallible, and can make no mistake.

It would seem, however, that Kin-Fo had come to the conclusion that it was preferable to live under European rather than Chinese authority; he had chosen to reside not in Shang-Hai itself, but in the portion of land that had been assigned to the English, and in which they maintained an independent autonomy.

Shang-Hai proper is situated on the left-hand bank of the little Wang-Poo River, which, meeting the Woosung at right-angles, joins the Yang-tse-Kiang, or Blue River, and ultimately flows into the Yellow Sea. The town is oval in shape, lying north and south, enclosed by high walls, through which five outlets lead to the suburbs. The

narrow dirty streets are little better than paved lanes ; the dingy shops, without fronts or stocks to attract, are served by shopmen often naked to their waists ; not a carriage nor palanquin, and very rarely even a horseman, passes by ; here and there are scattered a few native temples and chapels belonging to foreigners ; the only places of recreation are a "tea-garden," and a swampy parade-ground, the dampness of which is accounted for by its being on the site of former rice-fields. Such are the chief points of a town, which, undesirable as it may seem as a place of residence, yet numbers a population of 200,000, and is of considerable commercial importance.

It was, in fact, the first town, after the treaty of Nanking, that was thrown open to European traffic, and in which foreigners were permitted to form establishments. Outside the town and suburbs, three portions of territory have been granted, subject to an annual rent, to the French, English, and Americans, who have settled there to the number of about two thousand.

Of the French grant of land, or "concession," as being of the least importance, there is little to be said. It lies almost entirely to the north of the town, and extends as far as the small river Yong-King-Pang, which separates it from the English allotment. It contains the churches of the Lazarists and Jesuits, in connexion with which four miles from the town is the College of Tsikavé, where

degrees are granted to the Chinese. The colony, however, is so small that it can bear no comparison with its neighbours; out of the ten houses of business established there in 1861, only three now remain, and even the discount bank has migrated to the English settlement.

The American territory lies nearer the Woo-Sung, and is separated from the English concession by the Soo-Choo Creek, spanned by a wooden bridge. Its chief buildings are the Hotel Astor and the Mission Church. There are also docks of some magnitude to which European as well as American vessels are brought for repairs.

But by far the most flourishing of the three settlements is that appropriated to the English. The handsome residences on the quays with luxurious verandahs and elegantly laid-out gardens, the abodes of merchant princes, the Oriental Bank, the "Kong" belonging to the celebrated house of Dent, the offices of the Jardynes, Russells, and other great firms, the English club, the theatre, the tennis-court, the race-course, the library, all unite to form what has, with no inconsiderable amount of justice, been called "the model colony," and, under a liberal administration as it is, it is not altogether surprising to find what M. Léon Rousset has described as "*une ville chinoise d'un caractère tout particulier et qui n'a d'analogue nulle part d'ailleurs.*"

The foregoing account explains how a stranger approaching this corner of the world by the picturesque route of the

Blue River, would behold four flags floating in the same breeze, the French tricolour, the Union Jack, the American stars and stripes, and the yellow cross on the green ground of the Celestial Empire.

Around Shang-Hai, the environs are flat and void of trees. Narrow stony roads and footpaths intersect each other at right angles; reservoirs and "arroyos" provide the vast rice plantations with water; numberless canals convey the junks right into the middle of the fields, as in Holland. The whole scene may be compared to a drawing of a great green landscape without a frame.

It was getting on towards midday when the "Perma" came alongside the quay of the eastern suburb of the native port. Kin-Fo and Wang landed at once. The bustle and the crowd were indescribable. On the river were junks by hundreds, pleasure-boats, "sampans" resembling gondolas, gigs, and craft of every size, a veritable floating city, the home of a population that cannot be estimated at less than 40,000 souls, all of the lower class, of whom the most fortunate and well-to-do can never hope to rise to the rank of literates or mandarins. The quay, too, was as densely peopled as the water, for there swarmed a motley multitude, merchants of all grades, vendors of oranges, earth-nuts, and shaddocks, seamen of many a nation, water-carriers, fortune-tellers, Buddhist priests, Catholic priests, dressed in Chinese fashion, native soldiers,

"ti-paos," or local police, and "compradores," agents for transacting the negotiations with European merchants.

The two friends sauntered leisurely along the quay. Kin-Fo, fan in hand, in careless indifference, hardly cast a look at the noisy multitude that thronged around. For him, owner as he was of a fortune that would go some way towards buying a good slice of the whole suburbs, the chink of the Mexican piastres, silver taels, and copper sapecks,¹ in their active circulation was a sound that excited no personal interest. Wang had opened his huge yellow umbrella decorated with figures of black monsters, and walked along, suffering very little to escape the keen eye of his observation. As they passed the East Gate, he caught sight of about a dozen bamboo-cages which contained the heads of a lot of criminals who had been executed the day before.

"Better have filled those fellows' heads with knowledge than cut them off," he muttered to himself.

Kin-Fo did not happen to hear the remark, otherwise he might have felt considerable surprise at such a sentiment uttered by one who formerly had been a Tai-Ping.

Leaving the quay, and passing round the walls, they came close upon the French allotment, and had their attention directed to a man dressed in a long blue robe,

¹ The piastre is worth about 4s. 3½d.; the tael about 6s. 7d. The sapeck is only one-twentieth of a penny.



The two friends sauntered leisurely along the quay.

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"Ah, look!" cried Wang, "here is a Sien-Cheng!"

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who was trying to attract a crowd by beating a hollow buffalo's horn with a stick.

"Ah, look!" cried Wang, "here is a sien-Cheng!"

"Well," said Kin-Fo; "what of that?"

"Oh! it's just the time; you are going to be married; he must tell your fortune!" replied the philosopher.

Kin-Fo had no wish for his fortune to be told, and was conscious of his reluctance; nevertheless, at Wang's suggestion he came to a standstill.

A "sien-Cheng" is a recognized itinerant fortune-teller, who for a few sapecks is ready to reveal all the secrets of the future. His professional appliances are nothing more than a pack of sixty-four cards, and a small bird in a cage which he carries attached to his button-hole: the cards are painted with pictures of gods, men, and beasts. The Chinese generally are very superstitious, but they are particularly prone to respect the prognostications of a sien-Cheng.

At a sign from Wang, the man spread a calico sheet upon the ground, and deposited his bird-cage upon it. He then produced his pack of cards, shuffled them, and dealt them out face downwards upon the sheet. Opening the door of the cage, he retired for the bird to come out. The bird hopped out, picked up a card, and hopped back again. It was rewarded with a grain or two of rice. The card was turned up. It was a picture of a man, and a

motto was written under the picture in "kunan-runa," the official language of the north, which is understood by none except the educated classes. The sien-Cheng took up the card, and formally exhibiting it, began to tell the identical story which is delivered by fortune-tellers all over the world—there should be first one grievous difficulty, and afterwards bliss for ten thousand years.

"Not so bad!" blandly observed Kin-Fo; "one difficulty is not much;" and he flung a tael on the white sheet. The fortune-teller clutched at the silver piece as a hungry dog would clutch at a bone; it was rarely that a guerdon so good fell to his lot.

They recommenced their way, and approached the French colony; the tutor pondering how remarkably the oracle they had just consulted coincided with his own theories, the young man nursing the conviction that no serious difficulty was likely to befall him. They passed the French consulate, crossed the narrow bridge over the Yang-King-Pang, and, entering the British quarter, kept on their way until they reached the chief European quay.

By this time the midday hour had struck, at which a Chinaman's commercial day comes to a close. Quickly the stir of business began to lull, and, as if by magic, the bustle of the English settlement subsided into a still and noiseless calm.

Several ships had just entered the port, the majority of

them carrying the British flag. A proportion of nine out of ten of them were probably freighted with opium, that powerful narcotic with which England supplies China, it is said, at a profit of 300 per cent. and at an advantage to her revenue of nearly 10,000,000*l.* a year. In vain has the Chinese Government expostulated and endeavoured to put a stop to the importation; the war of 1841, and the Treaty of Nanking alike have secured open rights to British traders, and although the Government at Peking has pronounced a penalty of death upon any Chinese subject who directly or indirectly traffics in the drug, ways and means are ever found to evade the enactment and to escape the punishment. It is asserted that the mandarin governor of Shang-Hai annually adds some thousands of pounds to the emoluments of his post, merely by shutting his eyes to the delinquencies of his subordinates.

It is only justice to record that neither Kin-Fo nor Wang ever yielded to the seductions of opium-smoking; not an ounce of the dangerous poison had ever found its way to the interior of the handsome dwelling at which within another hour the young man and his sage counsellor arrived.

"Better teach a nation than stupify them!" Wang would repeatedly say, and ignoring the Tai-ping principles of former days would add—"Commerce is all very well, but philosophy is better!"

CHAPTER IV.

KIN-FO AT HOME.

A YAMEN is a collection of various buildings arranged in parallel lines, and crossed at right angles by a corresponding series. As a general rule, yamens are the property of the emperor, and occupied only by mandarins of high rank, but as they are not absolutely prohibited to men of very large means, Kin-Fo was in possession of one of these luxurious abodes.

He and Wang stopped at the principal entrance of the large enclosure that surrounded the entire structure and comprehended all the gardens and courtyards. If the yamen had been the residence of a mandarin magistrate instead of that of a private person, the carved and painted porch would have been furnished with a huge drum, upon which claimants for justice, by day or by night, might have announced their arrival ; in its place, however, were capacious porcelain jars kept constantly replenished by the house-steward with cold tea for the use of passers-by—a

considerate act of generosity which earned for Kin-Fo the good will of all his neighbours.

Upon being apprised of their master's return the whole household came forward to receive him. Valets, footmen, porters, coachmen, grooms, waiters, watchmen, and cooks, were all drawn up under the presidency of the steward, and some ten or twelve coolies, engaged by the month to do the rougher work, were seen hanging about in the background.

The steward stepped forward to give his master welcome, but Kin-Fo passed him with a careless wave of the hand, and only said—

“Where is Soon?”

Wang smiled and remarked—

“Just like him! Soon would not be himself if he were found in his proper place at the proper time.”

Kin-Fo repeated the question.

The steward only said that he could not tell, nor did he suppose any one else could, what had become of Soon.

Soon was Kin-Fo's *valet de chambre*, his own special attendant, with whom no consideration would have induced him to part. Yet Soon was by no means a model servant. On the contrary, he was blundering and awkward, both with his tongue and with his hands; extremely greedy, and, withal, something of a coward; the very type, in fact

of the conventional Chinaman, as depicted upon hand-screens and tea-cups. On the whole, however, he was faithful to his employer, and was especially serviceable in one respect, inasmuch as he was the only being who seemed able to arouse him to a condition of activity. A dozen times a day would Kin-Fo work himself into a rage with Soon, the whole benefit of the exertion being lost upon the valet, but having the wholesome effect of occasionally shaking off the master's habitual apathy.

In a way not at all uncommon among Chinese servants, Soon made a practice of coming and presenting himself for chastisement whenever his conscience told him he deserved it, and on these occasions his master never spared him ; a few stripes on the man's back did very little more harm than a few drops of rain ; but the great punishment which Soon dreaded was not a whipping, but one which was invariably visited upon him for any grave offence, the loss of an inch or so of his cherished pigtail.

Nothing could exceed the estimate which a Chinaman puts upon the value of this appendage. To be deprived of it is a disgrace that only terminates with life, and is reserved as a government punishment for criminals. When Soon entered Kin-Fo's service some four years back, he had been proud of a tail that was not much less than four feet in length ; he had committed himself in misdemeanours so often that his tail now hardly exceeded two



Followed respectfully by the entire household, Kin-Fo entered.

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feet ; he had only to go on transgressing at the same rate, and very soon he would be absolutely bald.

Followed respectfully by the entire household, Kin-Fo entered, and crossed the garden. The trees for the most part were planted in pots which were themselves elaborate specimens of terra-cotta work, nearly every tree being cut into some grotesque shape or other, generally that of an animal. In the middle of the garden was a lake, liberally stocked with "gouramis" and gold fish, the surface of the water being well-nigh concealed by the foliage and bright red blossoms of the nelumbo, which is the finest of the water-lilies of "the land of flowers." A passing salute was made to a hieroglyph, representing some mythical quadruped, which was painted in brilliant colours upon the wall, and in a few minutes the door of the main building was in sight.

It consisted of a ground floor with an upper storey, built upon a terrace approached by marble steps. Bamboo screens were stretched out above and before the windows and doors, with the design of modifying the internal temperature. The roof of the structure was quite flat, and hardly seemed to harmonize with the embattled parapets, the variegated tiles, and the enamelled bricks that gave so fantastic a character to the surrounding buildings.

Inside, with the exception of a few rooms ordinarily occupied by Kin-Fo and Wang, the apartments were all

spacious saloons furnished with a number of cabinets with transparent panels, the panels being profusely decorated at one place with carvings of fruit and flowers, at another with sentences of the proverbial wisdom in which the Celestials delight. Seats were everywhere in profusion, the prevailing material being terra-cotta, porcelain, wood, or marble, although the stuffed and softer couches of the west were by no means wanting. Lamps of every design, and lanterns of every hue, were suspended in all directions, all decorated with fringes and tassels as variegated as the equipage of a Spaniard. An article of furniture that seemed indispensable everywhere was the "cha-kis," or little tea-table, to be brought into requisition upon a moment's notice.

Hour after hour might have been spent in examining the many knick-knacks of ivory and mother-of-pearl, the bronzes inlaid with niello, the burners for exhaling perfume, the filagrees of gold and white and emerald green, the vases of prismatic glass, historic with the memories of the dynasty of Ming and Tsing, the still rarer porcelain of the age of Yen, and all the enamels, wonderful in that pink and yellow transparency of which the secret of the production seems now completely lost. Look around, and it must be owned that here indeed is a dwelling of luxury; the West has conspired to assist the East, and together they have wrought a concentration of ease, of beauty, and of magnificence.

Kin-Fo was really a man of liberal, advanced, and progressive views ; he would have been the very last to offer opposition to the introduction of any modern invention, and was the most unlikely of all men to entertain a prejudice against the civilization of the West. Science in any form commended itself to his approval ; no sympathy had he with the barbarians who cut the electric cable, laid down to facilitate the working of the English and American mails ; neither was he a partisan of the antiquated mandarins who refused to permit the submarine cable between Shang-Hai and Hong Kong to be joined to the mainland, insisting upon its being only attached to a boat in the open river. He had, on the other hand, associated himself avowedly with the party that backed up the government in constructing docks and arsenals at Foo-Choo, under the direction of French engineers ; he held shares in the China Steamship Company, that works the service between Tien-Tsin and Shang-Hai ; and, moreover, had money invested in the venture of anticipating the English mail by four days, through the establishment of a line of fast ships from Singapore.

There was hardly a modern scientific appliance that had not been adopted in his house ; he had a telephone that placed him in communication with every department of the yamen ; he had electric bells fitted to every chamber ; during the winter he had fires which gave a genial warmth ;

whilst nearly all his countrymen were shivering in blankets over their empty grates; he burned gas, like the Inspector of Customs at Peking, seeing no reason why he should be outdone by Yang, the leading pawnbroker of the empire; and finally, he had ignored the ordinary habit of writing by hand, and for his private correspondence, had purchased one of the phonographs recently brought to great perfection by Edison.

In spite of everything, however, and although he seemed to have all the resources which mortal man could ask for enjoyment, Wang's pupil had not acquired the philosophy which made him truly happy; Soon's vagaries every now and then might serve to awaken him from the drowsiness of apathy; but manifestly there was a missing element in the conditions of genuine felicity.

He entered the vestibule, the spacious hall that opens into the other chambers, but still the expected valet did not make his appearance. The conjecture was only too easy to make: Soon had evidently been guilty of some misdemeanour, and was in no hurry to show himself; he was keeping away to the last possible moment, aware that to come into his master's presence was to put his precious pigtail into new peril.

Kin-Fo was impatient, and shouted—

“Soon! Soon!”

Wang took up the cry, and called,—

"Soon!"

But the valet, if he were within hearing, was not to be moved.

"He is quite incorrigible," said Wang; "no precepts of philosophy do him any good."

Kin-Fo stamped his foot and summoned the steward.

"Find Soon, and send him to me!"

The whole household was set in motion; the missing valet had to be hunted out.

Finding himself and Kin-Fo alone, Wang took the opportunity of saying,—

"The voice of wisdom admonishes the weary traveller that he should take repose."

"Yes; we may do worse than listen to the voice of wisdom," Kin-Fo replied.

Accordingly, each retired to his own apartment.

Flinging himself upon a luxurious couch, a piece of furniture of European make, which no Chinese upholsterer could have imagined, Kin-Fo began to muse. Where else should his thoughts so naturally turn, as to the beautiful and accomplished lady he was about to make his own for life? Her home was at Peking. There Kin-Fo was about to join her. He debated with himself whether or no he should apprise her of his intended visit. It would, he thought, undoubtedly be well to express some impatience to see her again, and certainly he regarded her with sincere

affection. Wang had adduced many logical proofs that there was no mistake about the matter, and might it not really be that the step he was about to take, would really introduce the elements of happiness which hitherto his experience had somehow missed ?

He mused on ; he closed his eyes ; his ponderings became indistinct ; he was all but falling asleep, when he felt a sudden tickling in his right hand ; instinctively he closed his fingers, and grasped a knotted cane. He knew at once what had happened. The bamboo-rod had been slipped into his hand by his valet, who crouched by his side and meekly said,—

“When master pleases !”

Kin-Fo started up and brandished the cane. Soon crouched down to the carpet. Supporting himself with his left hand, he held up a letter in his right,—

“For you,” he said, “this is for you.”

“Rascal, where have you been ?” cried Kin-Fo.

“Ai ai ja,” groaned Soon ; “I did not expect you till the third watch. Beat me ! beat me ; I am ready, when master pleases.”

The valet's face turned several degrees paler as his master flung the cane angrily on the ground.

“Tell me,” exclaimed Kin-Fo, “why is it you expect a beating ? what have you done ? tell me at once !”

“This letter,” gasped Soon.



“ Ai ai ja ! ”

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"Well, what about that letter?" shouted Kin-Fo, and he snatched it from his hand.

"I forgot it; I forgot to give it you before you went to Canton."

"A week ago, you vagabond; come here."

"I am a crab without claws," piteously bewailed Soon.

"Come here!" shrieked his master.

"Ai ai ja!" moaned the servant.

This "ai ai ja," was a wail of despair. Already Kin-Fo had seized the unfortunate valet by his pigtail, and in an instant had caught up a pair of scissors, and snipped off its tip.

The crab soon found its claws again, and after scrupulously picking up every morsel of the hair that was lying on the carpet, made his escape from the room. Twenty-three inches before, the tail was only twenty-two now.

Kin-Fo threw himself back upon the couch. He was calm enough, when Soon was gone. It had been only his valet's negligence that had irritated him; he thought nothing about the letter. Why should a letter give him any concern?

He dozed again, and opening his eyes gazed abstractedly upon the envelope he held in his hand. It was unusually thick, the postage stamps were purple and chocolate, of the value of two and six cents respectively; plainly it had come from the United States.

"Ah, yes: from my correspondent at San Francisco;" and he threw the letter to the far end of the sofa.

"May be the Central Bank shares in California have gone up twenty per cent.; the dividends this year have improved; these things do not matter much to me." But though the current of his thoughts ran in this casual kind of way, his hand after a few minutes instinctively laid hold upon the letter again, and he opened it. He glanced at the signature.

"Just so," he muttered; "as I supposed; from my American agent; to-morrow will be time enough to attend to that."

He was on the point of flinging the letter aside for the second time, when the word "liability" caught his eye. It was written large and underlined at the top of the second page. His curiosity was unusually aroused, and he perused the entire document. For a moment, as he read on, his eyebrows contracted, but before he had finished, a contemptuous smile curled round his lips.

Rising from his seat he moved a few steps to an acoustic tube that communicated with Wang's apartment, he placed his lips to the mouthpiece, but suddenly altered his mind, and went back to lie down again.

"Pooh!" he said, with his usual characteristic expression.

Presently he murmured to himself,—

"To me it is nothing, but to her! to her it is a matter of much greater concern."

He rose again, and going to a little lacquered table on which stood an oblong box richly carved, was about to open it; but he paused, and said to himself,—

"What did she say in her last letter?"

Instead of raising the lid of the box, he touched a spring at its side, and immediately the soft accents of a female voice were heard.

"My beloved elder brother! Am I not better to you than the Mei-hooa flower in the first moon? Am I not sweeter to you than the apricot bloom of the second moon, or the peach bloom of the third? Ten thousand greetings to my beloved!"

"Poor little thing!" sighed Kin-Fo, as he opened the box, and removed the sheet of tinfoil covered with a series of indented dots that it contained, and replaced it by another.

The tender message had been conveyed by the phonograph, then recently discovered.

Kin-Fo then applied his own lips to the mysterious machine. For a few seconds she continued to speak with clear and distinct utterance, betraying in its equanimity no sign either of joy or sorrow. He had only a few sentences to say. He stopped the action of the instrument, removed the tinfoil on which the needle within had left its marks,

placed the document safely in an envelope, sealed it, and writing from right to left, directed it to

Madam La-oo,

Cha-Cooa Avenue,

Peking.

In answer to an electric bell a messenger promptly appeared, and the letter forthwith was despatched to the post.

An hour later and Kin-Foo had again sought repose. He had rested his arms upon his "Choo-foo-jen," a pillow contrived for coolness out of plaited bamboo, and very soon was fast asleep.

CHAPTER V.

UNWELCOME TIDINGS.

"Is there no letter for me yet, old mother?"

"No, madam, not yet."

The same question had been asked and the same answer had been given at least ten times that day in the boudoir of a house in the Cha-Cooa Avenue, Peking, where the beautiful La-oo was sitting with her crabby attendant, old Nan, who, according to Chinese custom with ancient domestics, was ordinarily addressed as "old mother."

La-oo had been married at eighteen to a man twice her own age, a literate of the first grade, engaged on the compilation of the famous Se-Ko-Tswan-Choo.¹ He died three years after his marriage, leaving his fascinating wife a widow alone in the world.

Not long afterwards Kin-Fo happened to be paying a visit to Peking. Wang, who knew the young widow well,

¹ This work, commenced in 1773 is to comprise 160,000 articles, of which only 78,738 have as yet appeared.

introduced her to his pupil, and suggested the idea that he should make her his wife. With the utmost complacency Kin-Fo acquiesced ; it was soon found that the lady was by no means indisposed to entertain the proposal, and accordingly, to the philosopher's great satisfaction, it was arranged that the wedding should take place as soon as Kin-Fo, after his return from Peking, should be able to make the necessary preparations at Shang-Hai.

It is quite an unusual occurrence in the Celestial Empire for widows to marry again, not because they themselves have no desire, but because the desire on their part would very rarely be reciprocated. Kin-Fo, however, was quite a law to himself, and did not hesitate to make an exception to the general rule. La-oo was intelligent and well educated ; she thoroughly understood the part she would have to play with the singularly apathetic being who was to become her husband, and it must be owned that she was attracted towards him by the wish to prove that happiness might form an element of his existence.

By remarrying she forfeited the privilege of passing under the "pai-loos"—memorial arches—which the Emperors from time to time had erected to the honour of women renowned for fidelity to their deceased husbands. One of these had been raised to the fame of Soong, who had never quitted her husband's tomb ; another to Koong-Kiang, who had cut off her arm as a token of her grief, and yet

another to Yen-Tchiang, who had disfigured herself still more severely. La-oo, however, thought that she could well dispense with this widow's privilege, and was quite prepared to lead the life of submission which the rule of her country demanded, was ready to renounce all conversation which did not concern the trivial affairs of domestic life, and professed herself content to conform to the code of the Li-num, which treats of the duties of home, and to be obedient to the precepts of Nei-tse-pian, which enforces the obligations of the marriage vow. Meanwhile she was quite aware that she should enjoy the consideration always granted to a wife, who, amongst the upper classes, is by no means the slave which not unfrequently she is supposed to be.

La-oo's husband, at his decease, had left her not in affluent but yet in easy circumstances. Her establishment in the Cha-cooa Avenue was very modest, old Nan being the only servant. The mistress was quite accustomed to the maid's contradictory habits, which are by no means limited to the domestics in Chinese households.

The favourite apartment of the young widow was her boudoir, the furniture of which had been of the simplest character until within the last two months, during which costly presents had been constantly arriving from Shanghai. Among the recent gifts were some pictures that adorned the walls, one of these being a *chef-d'œuvre* of

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the old painter, Wan-Tse-Nen,¹ which could not fail at once to attract the eye of a connoisseur as it hung, a contrast every way to the water-colours of modern Chinese artists, glaring with their striking anomalies of green horses, violet dogs, and bright blue trees. On a lacquered table, outspread like the wings of giant butterflies, were several fans from the great school of art at Swatow; around a hanging vase of porcelain was grouped an elegant festoon of artificial flowers, so exquisitely manufactured from the pith of the *Arabia papyrifera*, that only by close inspection could they be distinguished from the real *nenuphars*, *chrysanthemums*, and *lilies* of Japan, that were tastefully arranged in carved wood-work stands in various parts of the room; at the windows were hung blinds of plaited bamboo, which by a process of sifting

¹ The renown of the great masters is handed down to us in traditions that are not unworthy of credit. An anecdote is told of a painter of the third century, named Tsao-Poo-Ying, who having finished a screen for the Emperor, amused himself by putting in here and there a few flies, which he had the satisfaction of seeing the Emperor try to flap away with his handkerchief. No less celebrated was Wan-Tse-Nen, who lived somewhere about the beginning of the eleventh century. It is said that having been commissioned to execute some mural decorations within the palace, he painted several pheasants, and that when some foreign envoys, who brought some falcons as a present to the Emperor, were introduced into the room, the birds of prey mistook the painted pheasants for live ones, and made a dash at the wall, more to the injury of their heads than to the satisfaction of their voracity.

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seemed to moderate the intensity of the solar heat. Arranged in the form of a huge peony, the Chinese symbol of beauty, was a magnificent screen composed of hawk's feathers ; two aviaries designed as miniature pagodas were tenanted by Indian birds of gorgeous plumage ; some Æolian "tiemaols" vibrated pleasantly in the air ; and these were only some out of many souvenirs that had been contributed by the absent lover.

La-oo herself was charming. Her beauty could not fail to commend itself to the most critical of European eyes. Her complexion was fair, escaping entirely the national characteristic of being yellow ; her eyelids had scarcely the least inclination towards the temples ; her hair, which was rather dark, was set off by a little bunch of peach-blossoms, fastened in by bodkins of green jade ; her teeth were small and white ; her eyebrows stippled in most delicately with Chinese ink. No mixture of honey and Spanish white had been allowed to enamel her cheek ; no circle of carmine gave a false ruddiness to her lip ; no line of pencilling joined eye to eye ; nor was there on her countenance a tinge of the rouge upon which the court annually expends ten million sapecks. La-oo would have nothing to do with cosmetics. Rarely as she left the retirement of her house, she knew well enough that it mattered not to her, and that she was at liberty to dispense with the ordinary distinctions which

Chinese ladies feel bound to exhibit when they appear in public.

As simple as elegant was her dress. Over a pleated skirt she wore a long robe, embroidered on the border, and fastened at the waist by a stomacher embossed with gold flagree ; a pair of short trousers met her stockings of nankeen silk, and she wore slippers studded with pearls.

Her hands were delicately-formed, her long rosy nails being each protected by a little guard of chased silver.

That her feet were small was to be attributed only to nature ; it was not because they had been subjected to the barbarous deformation which has been recognized as a national usage in China for the last seven centuries, a practice which probably originated with some lame princess, although it has been laid to the caution of some jealous husbands. The operation is very simple ; it consists merely in bandaging the toes tight down under the sole, leaving the heel perfectly untouched ; but the effect is in the last degree injurious, as it utterly destroys the power of walking ; it is a practice, however, that is rapidly dying out, so that nowadays scarcely three Chinese women in ten are to be met with who have in infancy been made the victims of the trying ordeal.

"Go and look again, old mother," again said La-oo.

"What's the use of looking ?" answered Nan.



Old Nan grumbled, and left the room.

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"Never mind, go and look ; I am sure there will be a letter for me to-day."

Old Nan grumbled, and left the room.

La-oo took up a piece of needlework to amuse herself ; she was embroidering a pair of slippers for Kin-Fo. Embroidery is done by women of all classes.

The work soon dropped from her fingers. She rose and went to a bon-bon box, and taking out a few melon-seeds, crunched them between her little teeth. She took up a book. It was the Nushun, the code of directions which every married woman is bound to study. She glanced listlessly over its instructions :—

"The dawn, like the spring, is the proper time to work."

"Rise betimes ; indulge not in slumber."

"Be careful alike of the mulberry and the hemp."

"Spare not to spin thy cotton and thy silk."

"A woman's virtues are her industry and economy."

But La-oo was not in a mood for reading ; the precepts caught her eye, but her thoughts were far away ; she flung the book aside.

"Where is he now ?" she said to herself. "He must have returned from Canton ; when will he come here ? Koanine ! Koanine ! watch over his voyage !"

Her glance rested for a moment, almost mechanically, upon a patchwork tablecloth ; it was made of pieces as

minute as mosaic, and on it was pictured a mandarin-duck and its brood ; it was an emblem of fidelity.

Next, she went to a flower-stand and picked off a blossom at random.

"Ah!" she exclaimed ; " my fortune fails me ! I ought to have plucked a willow-bloom, the token of spring ; and see, here is a yellow chrysanthemum, the emblem of autumn and decay."

Not wanting to dwell upon the evil omen, she took up her lute and played a few chords of " The Clapsed Hands," but the song refused to come to her lips, and she laid down the instrument without further effort to proceed.

" It is not often," she murmured to herself, " that his letters are so long coming. And his letters, too, how sweet they are ; not merely the words he writes, but the words he speaks ; you may hear them for yourself."

And her gaze involuntarily rested upon the phonograph with which he had supplied her. It was a carved box on a lacquered stand, corresponding exactly with what Kin-Fo had himself used at Shang-Hai. By means of it they had listened to each others' voices. For some days, however, the apparatus had been silent and unused.

Old Nan re-entered the room.

" Here's your letter !" she said, and left the boudoir as abruptly as she had entered it.

The envelope bore the Shang-Hai postmark ; but with-



She put the mechanism in motion, and distinctly recognized the tones of her lover's voice.

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out waiting to examine the outside, the eager La-oo, radiant with smiles, tore it open, and extracted, not an ordinary letter, but a sheet of tinfoil marked with some indented dots that revealed nothing until they were submitted to the action of the phonograph, when she knew they would produce the inflexions of his very voice.

"A letter!" she cried; "and more than a letter—I shall hear him speak!"

Carefully she laid her treasure upon the surface of a cylinder within; she put the mechanism in motion, and distinctly recognized the tones of her lover's voice:—

"La-oo, dearest little sister!

"Ruin has carried off the last sapeck of my property. My riches have gone like leaves in an autumn blast. I cannot make you the partner of my penury. Forget, forget for ever

"Your unfortunate and despairing

"KIN-FO."

What a death-blow was this to all her expectations! Bitterness, she cried in her soul, bitterness more acrid than gentian had filled her cup! Had Kin-Fo forsaken her? What! did he think that she looked for her happiness in riches?

She was like a boy's kite with a broken string; slowly, slowly she sank downwards to the earth.

Nan was promptly summoned.

But Nan did not hurry herself. When she came, she shrugged her shoulders and lifted her mistress up on to her "hang." The hang was a bed warmed by artificial heat; but to the stricken La-oo the couch was cold as stone, and sleepless were the five long watches of that weary night.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CENTENARIAN.

THE following morning Kin-Fo, whose imperturbability over the affairs of life remained unaltered, went out quite alone, and with steady step took his way along the right-hand shore of the creek. Having crossed the river by the wooden bridge that connects the English colony with the American, he went straight to a fine-looking house that stood about midway between the mission-church and the American consulate.

At the entrance of the house was a large brass plate, inscribed in conspicuous characters with—

THE CENTENARIAN

Fire and Life Insurance Company.

Capital : 20,000,000 dollars.

Chief Agent : William J. Biddulph.

Without pausing Kin-Fo passed through the vestibule, pushed open an inner swing-door and found himself in an

office divided into two compartments by a horizontal balustrade fixed about breast-high. A few boxes, a number of account-books with massive metal clasps, an American safe, two or three tables at which clerks were writing, and an elaborate escritoire with compartments, appropriated to William Biddulph himself, made up the furniture of an apartment that seemed rather to belong to a house in the Broadway of New York than to any establishment on the Woo-sung.

William Biddulph was the principal representative in China for an important fire and life insurance company, which had its head-quarters at Chicago. The Centenarian had gained much of its popularity by its attractive title; it had offices and agents in every quarter of the world, and as its statutes were framed on a very liberal and enterprising scale, the business it did was continually extending. Even the Chinese were being gradually induced to adopt the modern system, by which so many of these companies are supported; a large number of their houses were already insured against loss by fire, and life-policies, with their various contingent advantages, were being more and more frequently taken up. The little escutcheon of the Centenarian was perpetually to be seen affixed to the face of buildings in all directions, and was not wanting on the pilasters of the rich yamen where Kin-Fo resided. The subject of fire-insurance had already been duly attended

to, so that it could not be that which led Kin-Fo to present himself now at the office, and inquire for William Biddulph.

Mr. Biddulph was within ; always, like a photographer, at the service of the public. He was a man of about fifty years of age, with a beard of unmistakably American type ; he was scrupulously dressed in black, and had a white cravat.

"May I ask," he said deferentially, "whom I have the honour of addressing?"

"Not altogether a stranger," was the reply ; "I am Kin-Fo of Shang-Hai."

"Ah ! yes ! certainly ! Mr. Kin-Fo of Shang-Hai, a client of ours ; policy No. 27,200. Most happy, sir, I assure you, if I can render you any further service."

"Thank you," answered Kin-Fo, adding, "I should wish to say a word or two with you in private."

"In private, by all means."

Accordingly the client was conducted into an inner room with double doors and hung with massive curtains, where a plot might have been schemed for overthrowing the reigning dynasty without the least fear of being overheard, even by the keenest "ti-pao." As Kin-Fo understood English and Biddulph equally well understood Chinese, conversation between them was a matter of no difficulty.

Kin-Fo took the seat which was pointed out to him in a rocking-chair close to the gas-stove, and at once opened his business.

"I am desirous of at once making an assurance upon my life in the Centenarian."

"Very happy to assist you, sir; the preliminaries can very soon be settled, and there will be nothing more except that you and I must sign the policy. You are actuated, I presume, by the natural desire to live to an advanced age."

"Advanced age! What do you mean?" said Kin-Fo abruptly. "I should have taken it for granted that insuring one's life contemplated the probability of an early death."

"O dear, no; quite the contrary. To insure in our office, sir, is to take a new lease of life; our clients are bound to live to a hundred. To insure in the Centenarian is the best of guarantees for a man becoming a centenarian himself."

The client looked at the agent to satisfy himself whether he was not joking, but he was as grave as a judge.

Perfectly satisfied with his scrutiny, Kin-Fo proceeded to enter into further particulars.

"I should wish to effect the insurance for two hundred thousand dollars."¹

¹40,000/.



“You are actuated, I presume, by the natural desire to live to an advanced age.”

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Unprecedentedly large as the sum was, the agent exhibited no symptom of surprise, but merely repeated the words "two hundred thousand dollars," and inserted the amount in a memorandum book.

"The premium for this?" asked Kin-Fo.

Biddulph smiled, and after a moment's hesitation said,—

"I presume, sir, you are aware that the policy is forfeited and no portion of the premium is recoverable if the person insured should die by the hands of the party in whose favour the insurance is effected."

"Yes, I am quite aware of that."

"And may I ask," continued Biddulph, "against what class of risks you propose to insure?"

"Oh, against risks of any kind, of course," replied Kin-Fo promptly.

"Very good," answered Biddulph deliberately; "we insure against death either by land or by sea; either within or without the limits of the Chinese empire; we even insure against sentences of death by judicial verdict, against death by duelling, or in military service; but as you may imagine, the premiums in these various risks differ very much and in some cases are rather high."

"I must be prepared to pay whatever is necessary," said Kin-Fo; "but you have not mentioned another risk which might occur; you have not specified whether the Centenarian insures against suicide."

"Oh, certainly, certainly," said the agent, and he rubbed his hands together with an air of extreme satisfaction; "you have alluded to one of our chief sources of profit; clients who insure against suicide are always those who, of all people in the world, are most tenacious of life; however, as you might imagine, it is one of the cases for which the premium is exceptionally heavy."

"The premium must be no obstacle. I have special reasons for the step I propose to take. I must agree to pay whatever is requisite."

"Very well, sir," answered Biddulph, and began to make some further entry in his note-book.

"If I understand correctly, sir, you wish to insure against drowning, against suicide, against—"

"Against everything, against anything!" cried Kin-Fo, with as much energy as his nature would permit.

"Very good," repeated Biddulph.

"Tell me the premium," said Kin-Fo.

"Our premiums, my dear sir, are tabulated with mathematical precision; they are the pride and stronghold of the company; they are not, as formerly, based on the tables of Deparcieux."

"I know nothing about Deparcieux," said Kin-Fo, with impatience.

"Indeed," answered Biddulph, with an expression of surprise, "Deparcieux was a remarkable actuary, but antiquated,

now, in fact, dead. At the time he composed his elaborate tables, which are still in use in most European offices, the average duration of life was lower than it is now. Our present calculations are reckoned on a higher average, of which our clients reap the advantage; they not only live longer, but they pay less."

"May I trouble you to inform me what is the amount of the premium I am to pay?" again asked Kin-Fo, as weary of listening to the praises of the Centenarian as the loquacious agent was desirous of repeating them.

"Before I can tell you the premium, sir, I must take the liberty of inquiring your age."

"Thirty-one," said Kin-Fo.

"Thirty-one," repeated Biddulph, "at the age of thirty-one in any other office the premium would be 2.83 per cent., in the Centenarian it is only 2.72. You see what you gain by coming to us. Let us see; for 200,000 dollars the yearly premium would be 5440 dollars."

"But that," Kin-Fo observed, "is for ordinary risks."

"Yes," said Biddulph.

"But for *all* risks, for everything, for suicide?" demanded Kin-Fo.

"True," said Biddulph, "that is another consideration."

The agent turned to the last page of the memorandum-book that he held in his hand, and consulted a printed

list. After a little reflection, he looked up, and in a very gentle and insinuating tone said,—

“I hardly think we can do it under twenty-five per cent.”

“You mean at the rate of 50,000 dollars a year,” said Kin-Fo.

“Just so,” asserted Biddulph.

“And how must that premium be paid?” inquired the client.

“It may be paid annually in one sum, or it may be paid in monthly instalments, at your choice.”

“And what then, do you say, would be the payment for the first two months?”

“For two months in advance, the premium would be 8333 dollars ; paid now, at the end of April, it would expire on the 30th of June.”

Kin-Fo took a bundle of paper-dollars from his pocket, and was about to pay the amount forthwith.

“Pardon me,” said the agent, “there is another little formality to which we must ask you to submit before the policy can be assigned.”

“Well, what is that?” asked Kin-Fo.

“You will have to receive a visit from our medical correspondent ; he will examine you, and report whether you have any organic disease which is likely to shorten your life.”

“But what,” remonstrated Kin-Fo, “can be the object of

that, when I am not insuring my life against disease, but against violent death, against suicide?"

Biddulph smiled blandly.

"My dear sir, do you not see that the germs of a disease may already be discerned, which would carry you off in a month or two, and cost us 200,000 dollars right off?"

"Disease would not cost you more than suicide," Kin-Fo insisted.

The agent took his client's hand gently into his own, and stroked it slowly, saying,—

"Have I not had the pleasure of telling you already that out of the applicants who come to us, none live so long as those who insure against the risk of suicide? And I may take the liberty of adding that we reserve to ourselves a discretionary right of watching all their movements. Besides, what shadow of probability could there be that the wealthy Kin-Fo could ever contemplate self-destruction?"

"As much perhaps," replied Kin-Fo, "as that he should take the step of insuring his life at all."

"Ah, nothing of the sort," rejoined Biddulph, "insuring in the Centenarian means living to a good old age and nothing less."

Argument, it was evident, was not likely to induce the agent to compromise his opinion. He continued his inquiries by asking,—

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"And in whose favour shall I have the honour of making the reversion of the 200,000 dollars?"

"Just what I want to explain," answered Kin-Fo; "I want 50,000 dollars to be pledged to my faithful friend Wang, and I want the residue, 150,000 dollars, to be the inheritance of Madam La-oo, of Peking."

Biddulph noted all the instructions in his book, and then inquired for Madam La-oo's age.

"Madam La-oo is twenty-one," said Kin-Fo.

"She will be of mature age before she comes in for this windfall," observed Biddulph, with a twinkle in his eye.

"And your friend Wang's age?" he added.

"He is fifty-five."

"Not much chance of the good philosopher handling his legacy at all."

"We shall see," sighed Kin-Fo.

"A man of fifty-five must be a fool to expect to get anything out of you, if you are to live to a hundred."

"Ah, well, Mr. Biddulph, good morning."

The wealthy client was bowed, with all formality, out of the office.

Next day, Kin-Fo received the visit of the company's medical adviser. He sent in his report,—

"Constitution of iron, muscles of steel, lungs fit for organ-bellows."

No obstacle, therefore, stood in the way of the application being accepted, and in due time the policy was properly signed. La-oo and Wang were, of course, in utter ignorance of the provision thus made for their benefit, and only unforeseen events could reveal the circumstances to their knowledge.

CHAPTER VII.

PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

HOWEVER much it might please William Biddulph to see things in a rose-coloured light, there was no doubt that the capital of the Centenarian was seriously threatened with the loss of two hundred thousand dollars. There was no mistake about Kin-Fo's intention to put an end to himself; he could not see the least good in prolonging in poverty an existence which riches did not suffice to relieve of weariness and *ennui*.

The letter which had been so long delayed in its delivery had announced that the Central Bank of California had stopped payment. Here it was that the whole bulk of Kin-Fo's property had been invested; the intelligence seemed authoritative, and would soon be confirmed by the papers, and the fact of his ruin would quickly be known. Beyond what property was locked up in the bank, he had next to nothing in the world; he might sell his house at Shang-Hai, but the proceeds would be utterly inadequate

to maintain him. The money which he had in hand he had now expended in the payment of the premium of his life-policy, and although he had a few shares in the Tien-Tsin Steamship Company, they would barely realize enough to pay his outstanding liabilities.

Under similar circumstances a Frenchman or an Englishman would have resigned himself forthwith to the prospect of a life of labour ; a Celestial sees things in quite a different light, and almost as a matter of course resorts to a voluntary death as the easiest mode of escaping his difficulties. Kin-Fo was a true Chinaman in this respect.

The courage of the Chinese is merely passive, but such as it is, it is developed in a remarkable way. Their indifference to death is quite extraordinary. In sickness they are never unnerved ; and a criminal, as he passes under the hands of the executioner, will exhibit no signs of fear. The frequent public executions, and the horrible tortures included in their penal code, have long familiarized the subjects of the Celestial Empire with the idea of renouncing life without regret.

Hence it is not surprising that the approach of death should be an ordinary topic of conversation, mixing itself up with the habitual transactions of life. The worship of ancestors is universal, and in the meanest hovel, no less than in the most spacious mansion, there is always a kind of domestic sanctuary, wherein are deposited the relics of

the departed, in whose honour a festival is duly observed in the second month.

In the same store where infants' cradles and wedding outfits are displayed for sale a variety of coffins is always to be found—"births, marriages, and deaths" supplying their demands at one common centre. Indeed, the purchase and possession of a coffin may be described as a *sine quâ non* to a Chinese of the present day ; no house is considered to be furnished without its coffin, which is not unfrequently presented by a son to a father as an appropriate token of the sincerest filial affection ; it is deposited in the sanctuary, where it is periodically renovated and adorned, and even after it has received its consignment of mortal remains, it is often preserved for years with pious care. Altogether, respect for the dead is a fundamental element in the religious faith of the Chinese, and it must be owned that it contributes largely to the maintenance of family concord.

Kin-Fo's temperament, cool and averse to excitability, especially predisposed him to face the thought of death without flinching. He had made provision for the only two individuals for whom he was conscious of any affection, and now had nothing more to do but to carry out the intention he had formed ; and to this he proceeded without any conception of committing a crime, but under the most solid conviction that he was doing a perfectly legiti-

mate act. His mind was fully made up ; no one, not even Wang, with all his influence, would be able to shake his determination ; not that Wang had any suspicion of his pupil's design, nor had Soon observed anything to make him guess what was on his master's mind, except that he had noticed that a singular indulgence had been shown to his blunders, and that, however much he might have deserved chastisement, his pigtail had been left without further mutilation.

A popular Chinese proverb says, " To get true happiness on earth you should live in Canton and die at Lai-Choo ;" the simple explanation being that at Canton the appliances of luxury are most readily obtained, while Lai-Choo does a large trade in coffins. It was now long since Kin-Fo had sent an order to Lai-Choo, and thence had procured a coffin, which was quite a masterpiece of its kind. Its arrival at Shang-Hai excited not the least surprise ; it was duly placed in the appointed chamber ; from time to time it was polished with wax, and left to await the hour when Kin-Fo's demise should bring it into requisition. At the same time that he bought the coffin, he bought a white cock, which was to be incarnated with the evil spirits that would otherwise hover around and obstruct the happy passage of the seven elements of the soul.

The mere possession of the coffin, however, did not quite satisfy Kin-Fo's mind. He felt it his duty to draw out an

elaborate programme for his funeral obsequies, and it will be seen that he by no means exhibited the same indifference to the details which belonged to the affairs of death as he affected towards the interests of life.

Taking a large sheet of what is generally known as "rice paper," although rice forms no ingredient in its manufacture, he proceeded to write down his instructions.

After giving his house at Shang-Hai to the young widow, and bequeathing to Wang a portrait of the Tai-Ping Emperor, legacies which they were to enjoy in addition to the benefit accruing to them from the assurance in the Centenarian, Kin-Fo went at once to the directions for his interment.

At the head of the *cortège*, in the place of relatives, of whom he had none, there was to be a number of friends, all dressed in white, the Chinese emblem of mourning. The streets, as far as the tomb, which was already erected in the suburbs of the town, were to be lined by a double row of attendants carrying either blue parasols, halberds, or silk screens, some of them bearing placards on which were inscribed the details of the ceremony; these were all to wear black tunics with white waistbands, and felt hats with red aigrettes. Behind the first group of friends a herald was to march dressed in red from head to foot, and beating a gong; he was to be followed by a portrait of the deceased Kin-Fo himself, borne in a richly decorated



Then was to come the catafalque.

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shrine. Next in order was another group of friends, whose duty it would be to fall fainting at regular intervals upon cushions carried ready to receive them ; this group was to be succeeded by another, consisting entirely of young people, who would be protected by a blue and gold canopy, and whose task it was to scatter fragments of white paper, each perforated with a hole designed as an outlet by which any evil spirit might escape that was likely otherwise to join the procession.

Then was to come the catafalque. This was to be an enormous palanquin hung with violet silk, embroidered all over with gold dragons and supported by fifty bearers ; on either side were to be two rows of priests arrayed in grey, red, and yellow chasubles ; the recitations of their prayers were to alternate with the mingled roar of clarionets, gongs, and huge trumpets. Finally, an array of mourning coaches, draped in white, would bring up the rear.

Kin-Fo was quite aware that the directions he was giving could only be carried out by the exhaustion of all his little remnant of property, but he was doing nothing that the Chinese would think in the least extraordinary ; such spectacles are by no means unfrequent in the thoroughfares of Canton, Shang-Hai, and Peking, where the people regard them only as the natural homage due to the dead.

The day upon which Kin-Fo had ultimately settled to take his farewell of life was the 1st of May. In the course

of the afternoon a letter arrived from La-oo. The young widow placed at his disposal whatever little fortune she possessed ; his wealth, she protested, was nothing to her ; for him her affection was unchanged, unchangeable ; why should they not be content with modest means ? why should they not still be happy ?

But Kin-Fo saw nothing to shake his resolution. "She will reap the benefit of my death," he said.

He had yet to settle the precise means of his death. To this point he began now to devote his attention, indulging the hope that he might find in the circumstances of his departure from the world an emotion that he had failed to derive from his experiences in it.

Within the precincts of the yamen were four pretty little kiosks, or pavilions, all decorated with that fantastic skill that is so exclusive a gift of the Chinese artisan. Their names were significant : there was the kiosk of Happiness, into which Kin-Fo persistently refused to enter ; the kiosk of Fortune, for which he avowed the supremest contempt ; the kiosk of Pleasure, for which he had no taste ; the fourth was the kiosk of Long Life.

Thus far did Kin-Fo resolve—he would go that night to the pavilion of Long Life, and would be found there on the following morning—happy in the sleep of death. There still remained the decision to be arrived at—by what method should he die ? Should he rip open his



Here he found himself in the open country.

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stomach like a Japanese? Should he strangle himself with a silk girdle like a mandarin? Should he open a vein as he reclined in a perfumed bath, like the Roman epicure of old? He reviewed these various devices only to reject them all; to himself they all alike appeared brutal; to his attendants they would be utterly revolting. A few grains of opium, mixed with poison subtle but sure, would carry him painlessly out of the world. The choice was soon made.

As the sun began to sink towards the west, and Kin-Fo realized that he had now only a few hours to live, he determined to go out, and to take a last walk upon the plain of Shang-Hai, along the bank of the Wang-Pow, where he had often sauntered listlessly in the seasons of his *ennui*. He had not seen Wang all day, and did not catch sight of him anywhere as he left the yamen.

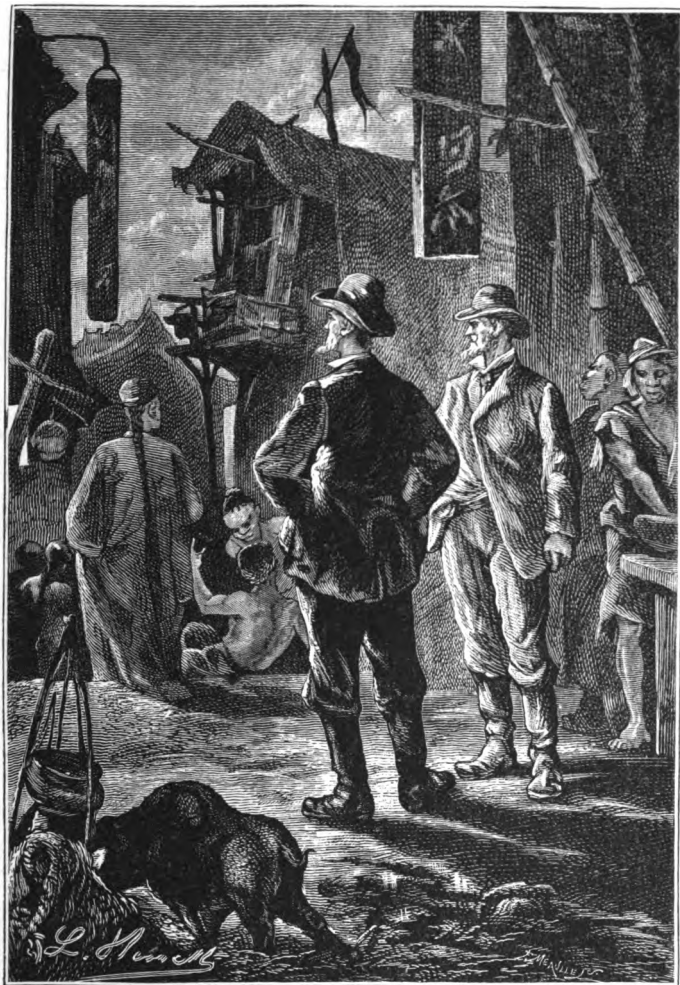
Very slowly he traversed the English territory, crossed the bridge over the creek, and, entering the French quarter, kept on till he came to the quay facing the native harbour. Thence, following the city wall as far as the Roman Catholic cathedral in the southern suburb, he turned to the right, and took the road leading to the pagoda of Loung-Hoo.

Here he found himself in the open country, on an extensive marshy plain that stretched far away to the wooded heights that bounded the valley of the Min. The

soil for the most part was given up to the cultivation of rice, except where it was broken by canals direct from the sea, or where some miserable reed-huts, with floors of yellow mud, were surrounded by patches of corn just raised above the level of the water. A number of dogs, white goats, geese, and ducks rarely failed to start off in alarm at the approach of a traveller along the narrow paths.

To the eye of a stranger the aspect of the country, highly cultivated though it is, would be decidedly repulsive. All the plains around the cities of China are like a vast cemetery, and on this plain there were coffins literally by hundreds strewing the ground. As well as mounds of earth showing where interments had been made, there were whole pyramids rising one above another, like the scaffolding in a dockyard. It is alleged that it is forbidden to bury any of these while the existing dynasty occupies the throne, but whether or not this be so, there they are, lying in tiers, some elaborately painted, some altogether plain and unpretending ; some fresh and bright, some crumbling to dust ; but all awaiting apparently for years the rites of sepulture.

Quite familiar with the strange spectacle, Kin-Fo did not look much about him, otherwise his attention could hardly have failed in being arrested by two men, dressed as Europeans, who had been following him ever since he left the yamen. They were apparently bent on keeping



Two men, dressed as Europeans, who had been following him ever since he left the yamen.

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him in sight, walking a little distance behind him, and regulating their pace precisely by his. Occasionally they exchanged a few words, and were evidently spies engaged to watch his proceedings. Both of them under thirty years of age, they were strong and agile, firm of limb, and keen of eye, and were careful not for a moment to let him escape their observation. When, after walking nearly three miles, Kin-Fo began to retrace his steps, they likewise turned and followed like bloodhounds on a track.

Meeting several miserable-looking beggars, Kin-Fo gave them some trifling alms, and a little farther on he came across some of the native Christian women who had been trained by the French sisters of charity, each of them carrying a basket on her back in which to put any child that might be found abandoned in the streets, and to convey it to a foundling-home. These women have gained for themselves the nickname of "rag-pickers ;" and, truly, what they gather from the by-ways of the city are often little to be distinguished from bundles of rags. Kin-Fo emptied his purse into their hands. The spies glanced at each other with a look of surprise at an act so entirely contrary to the habits of the Chinese. Only an unusual state of mind could result in so unusual an action on the part of a Celestial.

It was growing dusk when he reached the quay, but the floating population had not gone to rest ; shouts and songs

were resounding through the air, and he paused a few moments; it struck him that it would be curious to listen to the last song he should ever hear on earth.

A young Tankadere who was taking her sampan across the dark waters of the Wang-Pow began to sing,—

“I deck my boat with a thousand flowers,
Counting the hours;
My prayers to the blue-god ever rise
Homeward to turn my lover's eyes;
My soul impassion'd ever cries,
Will he come to-morrow?”

“To-morrow!” thought Kin-Fo to himself; “where shall I be to-morrow?”

“I know not what land of cold or drought
His steps have sought;
Roaming beyond old China's wall
Heedless what perils may befall;
Ah! could he hear my heart-sick call—
He would come to-morrow.

To seek for wealth, O, why didst thou stay
Far, far away?
Why dost thou tarry? the months glide by,
Waiteth the priest the bands to tie,
Phoenix¹ to phoenix ever nigh;
Come, O come to-morrow!”

The voice died away in the distance, and Kin-Fo began to reflect; although he acknowledged to himself that

¹ Two phoenixes, a common emblem of marriage, in China.



A young Tankadere.

riches are not everything in the world, he adhered to his view that the world is not worth having without them.

In another half-hour he had reached his home, and the spies were obliged to relinquish their watch over his movements. He directed his way quietly and unobserved to the pavilion of Long Life ; opening the door quickly, he closed it as quickly behind him, and found himself in a little chamber entirely without light, until he put a match to a lamp with a ground glass shade that stood ready for use. Close at hand was a table formed of a solid slab of jade, and on this there was a box already provided with opium, and with several of the deadliest poisons.

Taking a few grains of the opium, he put them into the ordinary red clay pipe, and prepared to smoke.

"And now," he said, "now for the sleep from which I am never more to wake !"

Suddenly he dashed the pipe to the ground.

"Confound it !" he cried ; "I am not going to die in this way without a sense of emotion. Emotion I want, and I mean to have it ! To die in this way ! Out of the question !"

He unlocked the door of the kiosk of Long Life, and hurried off to Wang's apartment.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SERIOUS CONTRACT.

WANG had not yet retired to bed ; he was lounging on a couch, reading the latest number of the *Peking Gazette*, and frowning very decidedly over the panegyrics that that journal passed on the reigning dynasty.

Bursting into the room, Kin-Fo threw himself into an armchair, and blurted out,—

“Wang, I have come to ask you a favour!”

“A thousand favours, if you will, my son!” said the philosopher, as he deliberately laid down his newspaper.

“Well, for the present, one is enough. Grant me the one I ask, and I will exonerate you from the nine hundred and ninety-nine. However, I must warn you beforehand you are not to expect any thanks from me afterwards.”

“I do not understand you,” replied Wang ; “will you explain yourself?”

“To begin with,” said Kin-Fo gravely ; “I must tell you I have lost all my property ; I am a ruined man.”

"Indeed, is it so?" answered Wang in a tone that implied that the intelligence did not give him any serious concern, but rather the reverse.

"Yes; it is true. You remember the letter that Soon ought to have given me; it announced the collapse of the Californian Bank. To me, you know, that means the loss of the last sapeck of my property. Except this yamen, and a thousand dollars or so to pay my debts, I have no means of living beyond another month or two."

"Then," said Wang, "it is no longer the wealthy Kin-Fo I have the pleasure of addressing?"

"No, it is Kin-Fo the impoverished, now; but it matters not; poverty has no terrors for me."

"Well said, my son;" and Wang raised himself as he spoke, and repeated, "Well said; here is the glad reward of all my teaching. Hitherto you have only vegetated, now you are going to live. Recollect how Confucius says that we always find fewer misfortunes than we look for; surely you remember the passage in the Nun-Schunn, 'There are ups and down in life; the wheel of fortune rests not, but rolls on; the breezes of spring-time are fickle, but rich or poor, do thy duty.' My son, we must now be off and on our way; we have now to earn our daily bread!"

The philosopher made a movement as if he were prepared to quit the sumptuous mansion without a moment's delay.

"Not quite so fast, my friend," said Kin-Fo ; "when I tell you that the condition of poverty has no terrors for me, you must not understand that I have the least intention to endure it."

"How so? What do you intend?"

"To die!"

"Die!" repeated the philosopher contemptuously. "You must know well enough that those who intend to be suicides never reveal their purpose beforehand ; it is a secret they always keep."

"It is by the merest chance that I am not dead now," said Kin-Foo calmly.

"What do you mean?"

"It was only because I found myself face to face with death," continued Kin-Fo, paying no regard to Wang's interruption, "and because I experienced nothing like emotion, that I flung aside the poison I was about to take, and came to you."

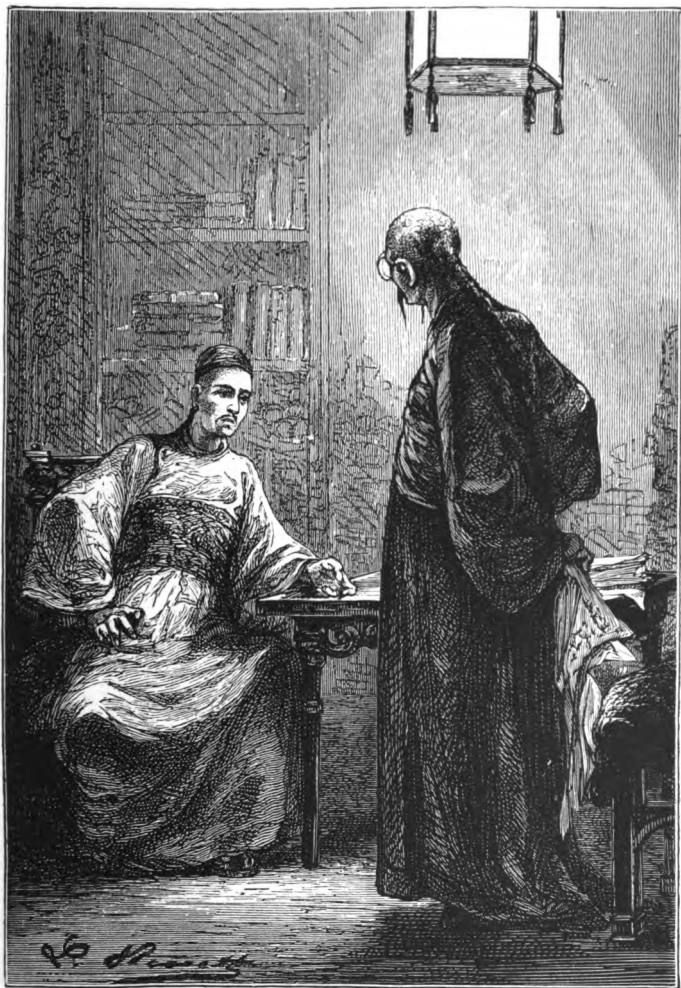
"Ah, yes, I see ; you thought we might as well die together," Wang answered, smiling.

"Nothing of the sort, Wang ; I want you to live."

"Why am I to live?" asked the philosopher.

"For the very purpose of killing me," said Kin-Fo ; "this is the favour I have come to ask."

It was a startling proposal, but Wang gave not the slightest indication of surprise. Yet Kin-Fo, who was



"It is by the merest chance that I am not dead now."

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watching him narrowly, could not help fancying that there was a strange glitter in his eyes. Was there a stirring up within of the blood of the old Tai-Ping? Had the lapse of eighteen years been insufficient to quench the sanguinary instinct of his early days? Was there not something that kindled anew an ancient and forgotten glow in the very prospect of soiling his hands with blood, even though it were the blood of the son of his departed benefactor.

But in an instant the unwonted fire was gone, and the eye lost its flash, to let the countenance subside into an expression even more sedate and serious than its wont.

He retired slowly to the couch from which he had risen, and said thoughtfully,—

“This, then, is the favour that you want to ask?”

“Yes, this. Perform it, and you may assure yourself that you have amply discharged every obligation due to my father or myself.”

“And you are in earnest?” demanded Wang.

“Most solemnly,” said Kin-Fo. “You know that on the 25th of June, the twenty-eighth day of the sixth month, I shall complete my thirty-first year. Before that date I must die, and the covenant which I make with you is that I die by your hands.”

“How? when? where?” ejaculated Wang.

“How, when, where, I care not. My purpose is not to know. Whether sitting or standing, waking or sleeping,

by day or by night, by open violence or by secret art, by steel or by poison, that rests with you. By the date I name to you I must die at your hands ; and the condition which I insist on is that I am to have no intimation beforehand. Thus shall every minute of the next fifty-five days be the source of the emotion of expectation, the looking out for the sudden termination of my life !”

All the time that Kin-Fo had been speaking, he had exhibited an animation, strongly in contrast to his ordinary lassitude ; but his unusual impulsiveness had not, betrayed him into any reprehensible lack of prudence. He had fixed the latest limit of his death for a date five days before the expiration of the policy, being quite alive to the recollection that he had no available funds by which he could renew it.

The philosopher sat and listened gravely, glancing repeatedly, it might be in unconsciousness, at the picture of the Tai-Ping monarch that hung before him, but having no conception of how it had just been made a legacy to himself.

“ You have heard what I have to say,” said Kin-Fo, after a short pause. “ You are ready, I presume, to meet my wishes ? You undertake to kill me, do you not ? ”

Wang made a hasty gesture of assent. Perhaps he was thinking how, when under an insurgent banner, he had done worse deeds before. But instead of giving a de-

finite answer to Kin-Fo's question, he met it by another :—
“Are you sure that you are so ready to sacrifice your chance of living on to a fine old age?”

“I tell you, Wang, my resolve is firm as adamant. To be old and rich is bad enough; to be old and poor is intolerable.”

“And what about the lovely young widow at Peking? Have you forgotten her? Heed you not the proverb, ‘The willow with the willow, the flower with the flower, two hearts united make a century of spring?’”

Kin-Fo shrugged his shoulders, saying, “A hundred years of spring may be followed by a hundred more of winter.”

He reflected a moment, and continued :—

“No; La-oo's life with me would be a blighting disappointment, miserable, drear. My death will secure her a fortune. And you, too, Wang, I have not forgotten you; I have left you 50,000 dollars.”

“Your foresight seems complete,” replied the philosopher; “you do not leave me scope to raise up one single objection.”

“Yes, there is one obstacle,” answered Kin-Fo; “and it surprises me that you do not suggest it. You must know that the deed to which you pledge yourself will cause you to be hunted down as an assassin in cold blood.”

“Cowards and fools are caught,” replied Wang significantly. “I am willing to undertake the risk.”

"And I, for my part," said Kin-Fo, "am resolved beforehand to insure you safe protection. I give you an indemnity."

He went to the table, took up a sheet of paper, and calmly wrote, in clear bold characters :—

"Wearied and disgusted with my life, I have voluntarily sought my death.—" KIN-FO."

CHAPTER IX.

SUSPENSE.

AT the office of the Centenarian, on the following morning, William Biddulph had an interview with the two detectives whom he had commissioned to keep a watch over his new client.

"Last evening," Craig was saying, "we followed him for a long walk into the country."

"And certainly he had not the least appearance of being likely to put an end to himself," continued Fry.

"We kept pace with him all the way back to his own house," said Craig.

"But had no opportunity of getting inside," added Fry.

"And how is he this morning?" Biddulph asked.

"Well and strong as the bridge of Palikao," they answered in a breath.

Craig and Fry were cousins, and genuine Americans. Had they been the Siamese twins, their identity could scarcely have been more complete; the same brains, the

same thoughts, the same motives, and even the same stomachs seemed to belong to them both ; their very arms and legs appeared to be at each other's disposal, and in speaking, one of them almost invariably completed the sentence which the other had begun.

"No ; I suppose you could not get into the house," said Biddulph.

The spies declared that they hardly thought that could be managed.

"And yet it ought to be done," continued the agent ; "it will never answer for the company to lose two hundred thousand dollars. You will have to keep a good look-out upon this gentleman for a couple of months, and longer if he should renew his policy."

"There is a valet in the house," said Fry.

"Who probably could give some information of what goes on within," said Craig.

"Ay, get hold of him," replied Biddulph ; "make him all the compliments that a Chinaman enjoys so well ; bribe him with drink, or with money if necessary ; you shall lose nothing by your pains."

Accordingly, the two men put themselves as soon as possible in communication with Soon, who was nothing loth to accept either a glass of American drink or a present of a few taels.

By dint of inquiry a good many particulars were got out



Nothing loth to accept either a glass of American drink or a present of a few taels.

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of him. Had his master lately exhibited any change in his manner? No, except that he had been rather more indulgent than usual to his valet. Had he any dangerous weapons in his possession? No, he had no arms whatever. How did he live? On food of the most ordinary kind. At what hour did he rise? In the fifth watch at daybreak. At what hour did he go to bed? The second watch, ever since Soon had been in his service, had been his hour for retiring. Did he appear preoccupied, or distressed like one weary of life? No, though he was never a man of exuberant spirits, he was never in the least gloomy; in fact, for the last day or two, he had been rather more cheerful than usual. Had he any poison in his possession that he would be likely to take? No; Soon thought it most unlikely; that very morning, by his master's orders, he had flung away a lot of globules into the Wang-Poo simply because they might be dangerous.

The cross-examination did not elicit a single fact that could in any way arouse the fears of Biddulph. Never had the wealthy Kin-Fo appeared in a happier or more prosperous condition. Still Craig and Fry felt their professional reputation too much at stake to allow them to relax their vigilance, and having come to the conclusion that Kin-Fo was not likely to commit suicide in his own house, they followed him more perseveringly than ever when he left home; they took care, besides, to cultivate a closer intimacy

with Soon, who was ready to talk freely enough with acquaintances at once so agreeable and so generous.

As for Kin-Fo himself, it would be too much to say that he had begun to have a real clinging to life now that he had determined to leave it, but the feeling of suspense had intertwined itself into his existence, and given rise to emotions to which he had hitherto been a stranger, and which began to thrill in his breast. He had hung, as it were, the sword of Damocles above his head, and it was in itself an excitement for him to know that it might fall at any moment.

Since the night on which they had entered into their contract, Kin-Fo and Wang had had no intercourse ; perhaps the philosopher had been out, or perhaps he was confining himself to his own room, engaged in devising for fresh execution one of the various schemes of assassination with which his early experience as a Tai-Ping had made him familiar. Kin-Fo could only form his own conjecture about the way in which Wang was employing his time, but the result was that curiosity of a new and personal character was being awakened in his mind, and to Kin-Fo curiosity was a new sensation.

As hitherto, they both met at the same table at meals, but their conversation on those occasions always turned upon the most ordinary and indifferent topics. There could be no doubt, however, that Wang had become some-

what gloomy and taciturn ; there was an abstracted look in his eye that his spectacles, huge as they were, could not conceal ; his appetite, ordinarily good, almost entirely failed him, the most delicate dishes and the costliest wines being of no avail to give him a proper enjoyment of his meals.

On the other hand, Kin-Fo seemed to relish every dish that came to table. The consequence was that his appetite wonderfully revived, and every day he not only made a good dinner, but digested it perfectly. It was, at least, quite evident that the secret use of poison was not the means by which Wang was seeking to bring about his end.

Wang had every facility for accomplishing the task he had undertaken ; the door of Kin-Fo's bedroom was always open ; either by day or by night he was free to enter, and could choose his own time for striking his victim, asleep or awake. In anticipation of being attacked in this way, Kin-Fo had so far considered the matter as to entertain the hope that any blow that might be struck might go straight to his heart.

So quickly, however, did Kin-Fo get accustomed to anticipations of this character that after a very few nights he slept quite soundly, awaking each morning bright and refreshed.

After a time it occurred to him that perhaps Wang

shrank from perpetrating the deed under a roof where he had been so long and so hospitably entertained. To obviate this difficulty and to afford every chance, Kin-Fo would go long distances into the country, always choosing the most deserted roads ; he would linger as late as the fourth watch in the most cut-throat quarters of the town, where murder might be committed with the utmost impunity ; he would wander through the dark and narrow streets, jostled by drunkards until the early hours of the morning, when the bell of the muffin-man and his cry "man-toou," "man-toou," heralded the dawn of day ; but he ever returned from his peregrinations as safe and well as he had set out, quite unconscious that however capricious his movements, they had never ceased to be under the surveillance of the indefatigable cousins Craig and Fry.

If things were to go on in this fashion, Kin-Fo began to fear that he should grow so accustomed to the condition of living a precarious existence that all his old *ennui* must very soon return ; as it was, hours would repeatedly elapse without the thought of his impending death ever crossing his mind at all.

An incident, however, occurred on the 12th of May which supplied a fresh excitement to his imagination. Happening to pass the doorway of Wang's apartment, he caught sight of the philosopher cautiously feeling the edge of a poignard with his fingers ; watching a moment longer, he



Wang was seen brandishing the poignard in the air.

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saw him dip the weapon into a violet-coloured bottle of very suspicious appearance ; another instant, and Wang was seen brandishing the poignard in the air, his countenance assuming an expression so ferocious that the blood seemed to mount into his very eyes.

“ Ah ! that’s it, is it ? very good ! ” said Kin-Fo, passing on his way without having been observed.

For the whole of the day Kin-Fo made a point of not leaving his own room, but Wang made no appearance. Night came on, and he went to bed ; morning came, and he was still alive and well. Was it not provoking ? Were not all his emotions going to waste ? Wang was a procrastinator, why else did he suffer ten days to pass ? What could make him dilly-dally in this way ? No doubt the luxuries of Shang-Hai had enervated him ; he had lost his nerve.

Wang, meanwhile, was becoming more gloomy and more restless than ever ; he began to be perpetually wandering about the yamen, and it was noticed that he made repeated visits to the chamber where the costly coffin from Lai-Choo was deposited. Not long afterwards it was mentioned by Soon to his master that orders had been given for the coffin itself to be dusted, cleaned, and re-varnished.

“ He is making it all clean and comfortable for you, you see,” said Soon confidentially.

Three more days elapsed, and still nothing transpired.

Was it possible that Wang was contemplating that the whole of the stipulated period should run out? Did he intend to postpone his action till the extreme limit of the time? If it were so, the result would be that death at last must come as no surprise at all.

On the 15th, another significant fact came to Kin-Fo's knowledge. He had passed an unusually restless night, and at about six in the morning awoke from a distressing dream in which he thought that Prince Ien, the potentate of the infernal regions, had condemned him not to appear before him until the twelve-hundredth moon should rise upon the Celestial Empire. This was to allot him a life of another century. Everything, surely, was conspiring to thwart him. It was consequently in no good mood that he rose that morning, and decidedly in a bad temper did Soon find him when he entered to give his accustomed services at the toilet.

"Out of the room, you rascal, before I kick you out!"

The valet was somewhat taken aback by a greeting so different to what he had lately received from his master, but having something to communicate he did not retreat.

"Out of the room, I say!" repeated Kin-Fo.

"I was only going to say—" began Soon.

"Off, you scoundrel!" said Kin-Fo.

"That Wang—" continued the servant.



Kin-Fo came to the determination that he would take up his quarters in the pavilion of Long Life.

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"Wang ! well, what about Wang ?" cried Kin-Fo, and he caught tight hold of Soon's pigtail.

Soon wriggled about in his master's grasp, in terror as to the fate that was to befall his tail, but in reply to the repeated demand, said,—

"He has ordered your coffin to be put into the Kiosk of Long-Life !"

A sudden gleam of satisfaction spread itself over Kin-Fo's face.

"Is it really so ?" he asked.

"The order is given," replied Soon.

"Here, my good fellow, are ten taels for you ; go and see that the order is attended to."

Nothing could exceed Soon's astonishment ; he hurried away, thinking to himself that if his master had gone mad, it was not a bad thing that his madness had taken a generous turn.

Conviction now came upon Kin-Fo's mind. Here was clear evidence that matters were coming to a crisis. No doubt Wang had come to the conclusion that he would kill him on the very spot where he had himself resolved to die. How long, how slow that day ! the hands upon the clock scarce seemed to stir ! but at last the shadows lengthened, and night brooded upon the yamen.

Kin-Fo came to the determination that he would take up his quarters in the pavilion of Long-Life. He entered

as expecting never to come out alive. He flung himself upon a soft sofa, and there he lay and waited. In the still silence of the solitude he began to reflect ; he thought of the unprofitableness of his past existence ; he pondered on the weariness and *ennui* of his old career ; poverty was no better than wealth ; he thought upon La-oo ; his attachment to her was a bright spot in his memory ; even now his heart beat at the recollection of her love ; but, no ; he was never going to involve her in his misery.

Thus passed the fourth watch, when nature, animate and inanimate, seems all at repose. Kin-Fo listened. His eye sought to penetrate the darkness. More than once he heard the creak of footsteps. More than once he was sure that a gentle hand was laid upon the door. A kind of longing mingled itself with a kind of dread. Why did he not fall asleep and so await in unconsciousness the approach of the Tai-Ping ?

But the fourth watch passed, and the fifth watch dawned. Day was about to break, when suddenly the door of the pavilion was opened roughly.

"The time has come !" cried Kin-Fo, starting up. His life seemed concentrated in that single instant.

It was not Wang.

It was only Soon. He held a letter in his hand. The letter was marked "Urgent."

"I have brought it at once," said Soon.

Kin-Fo seized the letter; it bore the San Francisco postmark. One glance at the inside revealed its contents, and Kin-Fo rushed impetuously from the pavilion, shouting,—

“Wang, Wang!”

He darted into the philosopher’s apartment, but in a moment was out again, still calling at the top of his voice :

“Wang, Wang, Wang!”

But Wang was not to be found. His bed had never been slept in. The whole house was aroused; search was made in every quarter of the yamen; no trace of him was to be seen. It was only certain that Wang had gone!

CHAPTER X.

A STRICT WATCH.

"ALL a trick, Mr. Biddulph, all a trick!" said Kin-Fo, in an interview which, as soon as possible after the receipt of his communication from San Francisco, he took care to have with the manager of the Centenarian; "it was nothing more than an American stroke of business."

"But it was very clever," replied William Biddulph, complacently; "everybody believed it, and it succeeded."

"My correspondent," continued Kin-Fo, "was certainly taken in; but he now writes me word that the stoppage was all a stratagem. The shares fell eighty per cent. In a week all was afloat again. The bank bought up all the depreciated shares, and when the inquiry was made, the answer was ready; the whole concern could pay 175 per cent. Till this letter came I had no doubt I was ruined."

"Yes; and being a beggar, you thought you would lay violent hands upon yourself?" said Biddulph.

"Just so ; but no ; not exactly that ; I was hourly in expectation of being assassinated."

"Either catastrophe would have cost us two hundred thousand dollars. Let me congratulate you upon your escape."

And in genuine American fashion, Biddulph grasped Kin-Fo's hand and shook it with much energy.

The client proceeded to confide the true state of the case to the manager's ear ; he told him how he had contracted with a colleague to kill him within a certain time, and how he had given a written guarantee by which the murderer could be protected from the consequences of his act.

"But the serious part of it all is this," continued Kin-Fo ; "the contract still stands ; he is still bound to take my life ; and there is no doubt he will keep to his bargain and kill me within the stipulated time."

"May I ask whether the hired assassin is a friend of yours ?" inquired Biddulph.

"Yes ; and moreover, he comes into 50,000 dollars by my death."

"Ah ! yes ; then I understand ; the friend is the philosopher Wang, whose interest is secured by the policy. But surely he is not a man who would perpetrate such an act as this ?"

Kin-Fo was on the point of explaining how Wang was,

in sober truth, a Tai-Ping, and how he had probably done dark deeds enough to make the whole Centenarian establishment bankrupt if his victims had happened to be their clients; but he was not disposed in any way to compromise Wang's life.

Eighteen years indeed had passed since Wang had taken any part in the bloody proceedings of the Tai-Ping confederacy, but perhaps any revelation concerning him even now might result in his being denounced as a revolutionist, and bring him under the suspicion of the government.

Accordingly, Kin-Fo forbore from saying more than that he believed that Wang would hold himself bound to fulfil his contract.

Biddulph considered for a moment, and then said,—

"Obviously, there is only one thing to be done; you must see Wang; you must make him understand that the contract is cancelled, and he will have to restore you the indemnity."

"Easier said than done," answered Kin-Fo; "the difficulty is that Wang has disappeared, no one knows whither."

"Oh, oh!" cried Biddulph; "that's bad," and he looked perplexed.

There was a mutual silence for some time.

"I presume, sir," said Biddulph presently, "you do not want to be assassinated now?"

"Quite the reverse. Why should I? The temporary collapse of the bank has doubled my fortune, and I have doubled my inducement to live. I want to get married."

"Of course," said Biddulph, with the blandest of smiles.

"But you see I am not safe until Wang is found ; or certainly not so long as this policy is in force."

"Neither is the office safe," observed Biddulph in an undertone.

"Until the 25th of June," continued Kin-Fo, "my very existence will be in peril."

"Yes, until the 25th of June," said Biddulph, "the Centenarian will be responsible," and the manager paced the room, deliberating, with his hands behind him.

"I tell you what it is, sir," he said, after a few moments' pondering ; "we must find your friend, the philosopher, even if he has hidden himself in the bowels of the earth."

"I hope you may," answered Kin-Fo.

"Meanwhile, we must take measures for protecting you from assassination, in the same way as we have guarded you from suicide."

"In the name of mercy, what do you mean ?" ejaculated Kin-Fo.

"Why, ever since the day you signed the policy with us, two of my people have been assiduously keeping a watch upon all your doings ; they have been everywhere as faithful to you as your shadow."

"And I not know it!"

"You might have known it had your look-out been as sharp as theirs; but they are cautious folks. I have not the least doubt they have followed you here. They have seen you in; they are waiting to see you out."

"Is it possible?" said Kin-Fo, speaking to himself.

"Craig! Fry!" called Biddulph, without raising his voice very much.

The two men entered.

"By your leave, sir, I will now entrust these employés of mine with a fresh commission. Hitherto they have been protecting you from yourself; they have kept guard over you that you should not commit suicide; they will henceforth protect you from mischief from without; they will guard you so that you receive no injury from Wang."

Kin-Fo had no alternative but to submit, and the detectives accepted their altered engagement without comment.

The next thing was to decide upon the line of action to be taken. As Biddulph remarked, two courses were open to them; either they might keep Kin-Fo constantly confined to his house under the surveillance of Craig and Fry, and take care that Wang did not enter unobserved, or they might pursue Wang till they discovered him, and make him surrender the document in his possession.

"By all means hunt out Wang," said Kin-Fo, "he

knows my yamen so well that whenever he pleases, he can find his way in without being seen."

"Yes; we will find Wang if possible," assented Biddulph; "but we must not lose sight of you."

"You will do no harm to Wang," Kin-Fo pleaded.

"He should be brought dead or alive," said Craig.

"He should be found alive or dead," repeated Fry.

"Oh, alive, or not at all," said Kin-Fo earnestly.

The plan of proceeding settled, Biddulph and Kin-Fo took leave of each other, and the wealthy Chinaman, escorted *nolens volens* by his body-guard, went home.

Very sincere was the regret with which Soon discovered that Craig and Fry had taken up their abode under his master's roof. Having no more questions to answer, he would have no more taels to receive. And what made matters worse, Kin-Fo had again commenced to censure and chastise him bitterly for his blunders and his idleness. Poor Soon! he little knew what the future had in store for him.

The first care of Kin-Fo was to send a "phonogram" to Peking. He was anxious not to lose an hour in announcing the recovery of his wealth, and La-oo was enraptured, independently of the tenor of the communication, at hearing once more the voice that she had feared was silenced for ever. The seventh moon, said the lover, should not wane before he would be at her side, never

more to leave her ; but before that time he could not see her, lest he should leave her the second time a widow.

La-oo could not understand the meaning of the last words of the letter ; but she knew that the lover promised to come, and to quit her no more, and this made her, that day, the happiest of women in Peking.

Very complete was the reaction that had set in upon all Kin-Fo's ideas and feelings. With the access of fortune had come an entire revolution in his view of life, and the friends that he had entertained at dinner so recently in Canton would scarcely have recognized their unimpassioned, apathetic host ; while Wang himself could hardly have believed his senses.

No trace of Wang was yet to be discovered. The foreign quarters, the bazaars, the streets, the suburbs were searched ; every corner of Shang-Hai was explored ; the keenest of the "ti-paos" were put upon the scent, but all in vain ; there was no clue, no vestige, no sign.

Craig and Fry grew more uneasy. More and more tenaciously they adhered close to Kin-Fo's side, they ate at his table, they slept in his room, they tried to make him wear a shirt of mail, and did their best to persuade him to eat nothing but boiled eggs, which, they said, could not be poisoned. Against these restrictions the wealthy householder naturally rebelled ; just as well, he said, for the next

two months, might he be locked up in the iron safe at the office of the Centenarian.

Looking at the matter from an official point of view, William Biddulph made the practical suggestion that the premium should be returned, and the policy destroyed. Kin-Fo, however, would not listen to the proposal; the bargain was made, and he would abide by the consequences. Finding him thus resolute, Biddulph acquiesced, only assuring him that he was fortunate in being in such good keeping as that of the office he had himself the honour to represent.

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNPLEASANT NOTORIETY.

SEVERAL days passed, and as no efforts succeeded in discovering the whereabouts of Wang, Kin-Fo began to chafe at the confinement and inaction that were being imposed on him. Biddulph himself became somewhat uneasy. Although at first he had thought it unlikely that Wang would carry the covenanted deed into execution, he felt bewildered, and began now to realize that in China stranger things might happen even than in America ; and at last he entered into Kin-Fo's opinion, that the mysterious disappearance of Wang was only the prelude to a reappearance when he would suddenly descend like a thunderbolt, and perpetrate the final act. The fatal blow once given, the philosopher would present himself at the office of the Centenarian, and claim his allotted portion.

Directly, indirectly, by all means, by any means, thought Biddulph, such a scheme must be frustrated. He resolved

to advertise; and, accordingly, not only had notices repeatedly inserted in the *Peking Gazette*, the *Tching-Pao*, and other Chinese newspapers published in Hong-Kong and Shang-Hai, but sent them by telegraph to all the leading journals of Europe and America.

It was first announced :—

“WANG, of Shang-Hai, is hereby informed that the contract made on the 2nd of May, between himself and Kin-Fo, also of Shang-Hai, is null and void, the said Kin-Fo having determined to die a centenarian.”

This advertisement was almost immediately followed by another :—

“REWARD.—Notice is hereby given that a reward of thirteen hundred taels, or two thousand dollars, is offered to any one giving information as to the present residence of WANG, of Shang-Hai. Apply to William J. Biddulph, Centenarian Insurance Company, Shang-Hai.”

It was not in the least likely that Wang was traversing any distant quarter of the world, during the few weeks that had been left open to him for the fulfilment of his compact; it was far more probable that he was only concealing himself somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood, ready to avail himself of a favourable opportunity: but Biddulph was not inclined to leave any stone unturned to bring about his discovery.

The advertisements he issued were made more and more

sensational. One morning a paragraph would appear headed in large capitals:—

“WANG! WANG! WANG!”

on the next a similar paragraph, beginning:—

“KIN-FO! KIN-FO! KIN-FO!”

Inevitably the result was that Wang and Kin-Fo became notorious names throughout the empire.

“Where is Wang?”

“What has Wang been up to?”

“Have you caught Wang?”

Ridiculous inquiries of this kind were in everybody's mouths, until even the children caught the infection, and ran about the streets crying out,—

“Who has found Wang?”

Scarcely less notorious became the name of Kin-Fo. Thus publicly announced as desiring to live to a hundred, he became the butt of perpetual jokes. The Emperor's elephant just completing its twentieth lustre in the royal stables, it was said, had found a new rival; the imperial yellow robe,¹ it was observed, had found a new claimant; jests without number were bandied about by mandarins,

¹ Every Chinaman who attains his eightieth year enjoys the privilege of wearing a yellow robe. Yellow is the Imperial colour, and permission for its use is only granted as an honour to old age.



Wang and Kin-Fo became notorious names throughout the empire.

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civil and military, by merchants on the exchange, by loungers in the streets, and by the watermen in their boats. One comic song, set to the tune of Man-tchiang-houng, "the wind that whistles through the willows," was composed upon the subject, and was succeeded by another called "The Centenarian's five watches," which had a prodigious sale at three sapecks a copy.

The Chinese delight in fun, and, ever ready for a joke, they are apt to allow their love of caricature to intrude almost too much into the reserve of private life; but the recent advertisements, it must be owned, opened up to them a fair topic for entertainment.

To Biddulph the sensation that was created was of course highly satisfactory; it answered his purpose in every way. What effect it had upon Wang no one could tell, as he succeeded in evading the most vigorous search that was set on foot to discover him; but to poor Kin-Fo the notoriety which he had attracted was the very reverse of pleasant. It soon became impossible for him to walk along the streets or quays without being thronged by a set of idlers; nor did he escape the nuisance when he went out into the country; while he could never return to his yamen without finding a regular mob assembled at the door. Every morning he was vociferously summoned to the balcony, that the populace might see for themselves that he had not been consigned to his coffin; and bulletins

were published regularly in the daily journals, after the fashion of the Imperial Court Circular, to record his state of health, and report all his movements.

To endure such a condition of things was out of the question. Existence on such terms was intolerable. On the morning of the 21st he hurried off to Biddulph, and acquainted him with his intention of quitting Shang-Hai forthwith.

The agent, really concerned for the Company's interests, pointed out to him the great risk he would be running.

"Never mind!" said Kin-Fo, "I will take my chance, and you must use greater precautions."

"But consider," pleaded Biddulph.

"I am going," interrupted Kin-Fo.

"Going where?"

"Anywhere; straight ahead."

"Where shall you stop?"

"Nowhere."

"And when shall you come back?"

"Never."

"But if we find Wang?"

"A plague upon Wang!"

"But remember your bargain."

"Yes, I was a fool."

"We may catch Wang yet."

"Let him go to the devil."

It must be confessed, however, that in his heart Kin-Fo had the most intense anxiety for Wang to be found. The knowledge that his life was gratuitously placed in the hands of another was now a perpetual torment to him ; it was worse than living in a state of siege, and the prospect of going through more than another month of such suspense was beyond endurance.

"And you really mean to go?" resumed Biddulph.

"I have told you once," said Kin-Fo.

"You are aware, I presume, that Craig and Fry will have to go with you?"

"As you please ; I only warn you that they will have to travel pretty fast."

"Go they must," repeated Biddulph, "they shall be ready when you please."

Returning to the yamen, Kin-Fo immediately set about the necessary preparations for departure. His announcement to Soon that he would have to accompany him was a grievous annoyance to the valet, who hated nothing so much as being hurried and hustled about : but he had too much regard for his pigtail to venture either upon remonstrance or objection.

In a very short time Craig and Fry, with true American promptness, presented themselves, and announced that they were ready to start.

"In what direction—" began Craig.

"Are we to go?" continued Fry.

"To Nanking first, and then to the deuce," said Kin-Fo sharply.

The spies exchanged a smile, and having satisfied themselves that Kin-Fo would not start until towards evening, they went away to say a few words to Biddulph, and to change their clothes for Chinese costumes, which would attract less attention. In good time, with bags at their sides, and revolvers in their waistbands, they returned to the yamen.

It was getting dusk when, under as little observation as possible, they proceeded to the harbour in the American quarter, and embarked on board one of the steamers that run between Shang-Hai and Nanking, a voyage that with a favourable tide rarely takes more than twelve hours.

But short as was the passage, Craig and Fry were cautious not to overlook any detail that might ensure the safety of the life they had under their care. They made it their first concern to scrutinize all the other passengers; they had lived long enough in the locality of Shang-Hai to be familiar with the bland and benevolent features of Wang, and did not rest until they had made certain that he had neither preceded them nor followed them on board. But when all these external matters had been attended to,



Rapidly the steamer descended the Woo-Sung.

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they devoted all their watchfulness to the personal welfare of their charge. They ascertained the strength of every railing on which he leant ; they tested the stability of every plank on which he trod ; they kept him at a prudent distance from the engines, in case they should burst ; they remonstrated with him when he exposed himself to the chill night air ; they looked to the port-holes of his cabin to ascertain that they were properly closed ; they carried him his tea and his cake, not omitting meanwhile to reprove Soon most sternly for his neglect of his master ; and finally, they lay down, still undressed, at the door of the cabin, not without having provided themselves with life-belts, so that the proper resources should all be ready in case of collision, explosion, or other disaster by which the vessel might be liable to founder.

Everything, however, went well ; nothing occurred to put their alacrity to the test. Rapidly the steamer descended the Woo-Sung ; it turned into the mouth of the Yang-tse-kiang (the Blue River) ; and having passed the Island of Tsong-Ming, it left the lights of Oo-song and Lang-Chan far behind, and in good time next morning landed all its passengers on the quay of the ancient city.

It was with a definite motive that Kin-Fo on leaving Shang-Hai had, in the first instance, made his way to Nanking. He entertained an idea that former associations connected with the ancient place, once the stronghold of

the Tchang-Mao rebellion, might already have attracted Wang thither. Its history was full of stirring memories. Here had Rong-Sieou-Tsin, once a modest schoolmaster, but subsequently the Emperor of the Tai-Ping, held the Manchow authority long time in check; here in 1864 he had poisoned himself, that he might not fall into the hands of his foes; here had been proclaimed the new era of the great peace;² hence had fled the son of the Emperor, only to be captured and beheaded by the Imperialists in power. And had not his bones been torn from the tomb and scattered as refuse amongst the brutes of the field? in short, was not Nanking the scene, where, amidst burning ruin, a hundred thousand of Wang's confederates, within three days, had been massacred in cold blood?

Surely, argued Kin-Fo, it is of all things most natural that hither should Wang return; that, seized as it were with a kind of home-sickness, he should come back and sniff afresh the once-familiar scent, and, nerved by the ancient memories, he should be inspired at the proper moment to go back to Shang-Hai, and fulfil the covenant of blood to which he was pledged.

But, anyhow, it was as well to choose Nanking as any place beside for a first stage. If Wang should be discovered there, all well and good; at once there would be an end of every difficulty; but if not, Kin-Fo would travel

² The interpretation of Tai-Ping is "great peace"

on and on, until the time should have passed away in which there was anything to fear.

On landing, Kin-Fo led his party to an hotel in one of the half-deserted quarters of the town, where the ruins of the ancient capital lay scattered round them as a wilderness.

"I have a word to say to you," he said to his satellites ; "you must remember that I am travelling now under a fictitious name. Upon no pretext am I to be called Kin-Fo ; for the present I am Ki-Nan."

"All right !" answered Soon.

"Ki-Nan," replied Craig and Fry, dividing the syllables between them.

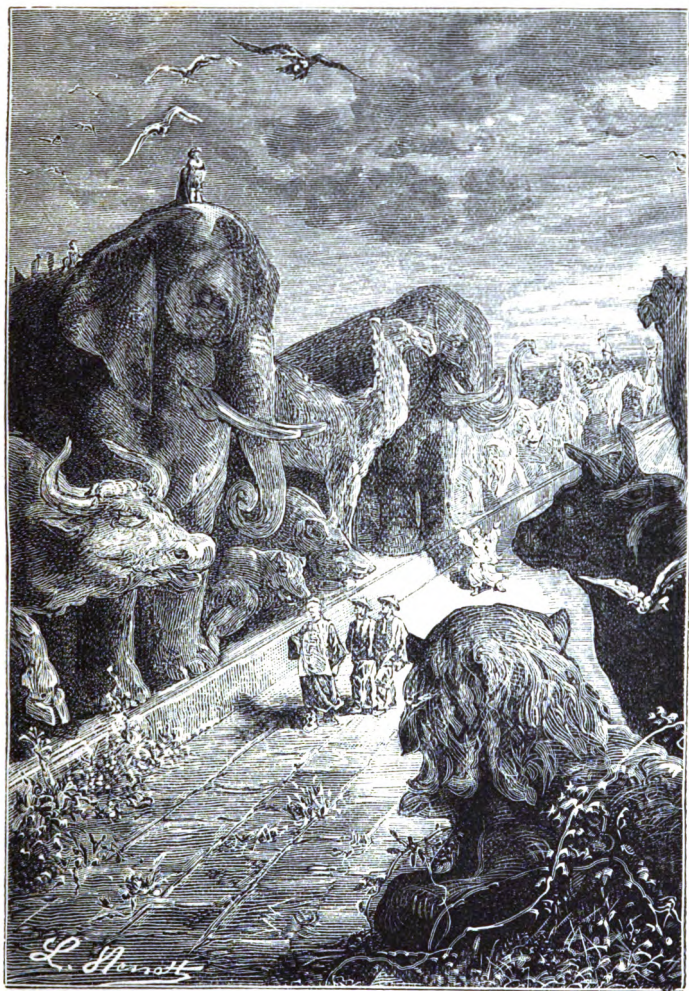
It was not to be wondered at that Kin-Fo took every pains he could to avoid being pestered by any repetition of the annoyances to which he had been lately subjected. He took good care not to breathe a suspicion of the expectation he entertained of meeting Wang in Nanking ; he was well aware that the hint of such a probability would only throw over him a fresh network of precautions and aggravate his grievances. In the eyes of Craig and his colleague he was nothing more than a parcel of specie that had to be convoyed safely through the perils of a hostile country.

The day was spent in exploring the place. From north to south, from east to west, the decayed city was carefully

surveyed; its ancient splendour everywhere was gone. Kin-Fo walked rapidly; he said little, but observed much, not only the features of the city, but the countenances of the passers-by.

But the familiar face for which he looked was not to be seen. Neither on the canals, where the population chiefly throngs, nor in the streets, desolate and overgrown, was there trace of the fugitive anywhere. Kin-Fo seemed proof against all fatigue. Poor Soon crawled on behind with lagging and unwilling steps; the men entrusted with the oversight of the wanderer found their energies sufficiently taxed, but onwards, onwards they went. They passed the ruined marble porticos and half-burnt walls that mark the site of the Imperial Palace; they passed the yamen of the Catholic missionaries who narrowly escaped being massacred amidst the horrors of the insurrection in 1870; they passed the gun-factory built recently with the indestructible bricks of the old Porcelain Tower; they passed, after many wanderings, out of the east gate, and found themselves in an open country.

Kin-Fo paused to look about him. As he left the city he found himself in a long avenue bordered on either side by colossal granite figures of animals. Proceeding along the avenue, he reached a small temple at its extremity, behind which was a mound so high that it might almost be called a hill. The mound was a tomb; beneath it lay



A long avenue, bordered on either side by colossal granite figures of animals.



“Wang has been here !”

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Rong-oo, the Emperor-Priest, who five centuries back had contested the burden of a foreign yoke. The idea could not be repressed. Had not Wang, before he dipped his hand once more in human blood, been moved to make a pilgrimage to this very sepulchre? Kin-Fo felt that he was about to encounter him in the very midst of the associations of the fallen dynasty.

Yet, no; the place was all deserted; the temple was empty. There was no guardian now but the line of figures that made the avenue; no living form in sight.

Kin-Fo was retiring. Suddenly upon the temple door he caught sight of the letters, obviously quite freshly carved:

W., K. F.

No mistaking these; they meant Wang and Kin-Fo, or they meant nothing.

"Wang has been here, perhaps is here now," said Kin-Fo to himself. He searched, searched anxiously and earnestly, but searched in vain.

There was no alternative but to retire at last. Soon could scarce drag his weary limbs. The Americans were glad enough to be once more at the hotel and at rest.

Next morning they all left Nanking.

CHAPTER XII.

LOCOMOTION UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

THE Celestials might well be puzzled by the stranger who now for a time pursued a hurried way among them. He was a traveller knowing not to-day where to-morrow would find him. He went to hotels, but tarried only for a few hours. He made his way to restaurants, but only to take the hastiest of meals. He was lavish with his money, but he spent it only to expedite his progress.

Manifestly he was not a merchant on a business tour; as clearly he was not a mandarin charged with some urgent mission; he was not an artist in search of the beauties of nature; neither was he a *savant* hunting out ancient documents from the religious houses; he was not a student on his way to the pagoda of examiners to get a degree; not a Buddhist priest on his round of inspection of the altars consecrated at the roots of the holy banyan; and not a pilgrim making his way to pay his vows upon one of the

five sacred mountains. Ki-Nan, the traveller, remained everywhere a mystery.

The client of the Centenarian seemed to have no design but to keep up a perpetual locomotion. Accompanied by Craig and Fry, who were ever on the alert, and followed by Soon, who was ever disgusted at the exertion he was called upon to make, he pushed rapidly onwards with the double object of escaping, and yet of seeking the indiscoverable Wang. On the one hand he was endeavouring to find a distraction from his own perplexities, on the other he was trying to evade the danger that threatened him, by keeping incessantly in motion, on the principle that a bird on the wing is harder to hit than a bird on a bush.

From Nanking they proceeded by one of the fast American steamboats, that, like floating hotels, convey passengers up the Blue River, and, after a run of sixty hours, landed at Han-Kow, at the confluence of the Yangtse-Kiang and its important affluent the Han-Kiang.¹ They had scarcely noticed, far less admired, the fantastic rock, "the little orphan," which stands solitary in the middle of the stream, and is crowned by a temple constantly served by Buddhist priests.

At Han-Kow Kin-Fo consented to rest for half a day. Ruins, utterly irreparable, in many places, were the tokens

¹ In the south of China rivers are distinguished by the termination "Kiang;" in the north by "Ho."

of the violence of the old Tai-ping, but neither in the commercial town itself, which is a mere annex to the prefecture of Han-Yang-Foo on the right bank, nor in Woo-Chang-Foo, the capital of the province of Hou-Pe, on the left, was there to be found any trace of Wang. Nor was there anywhere a repetition of the mysterious letters that had caught Kin-Fo's eye on the tomb at Nanking.

If Craig and Fry had been men anxious to turn their expedition to account and to gain much intimate acquaintance either with Chinese places or Chinese customs, they would have been very grievously disappointed, as the celerity of all their proceedings barely allowed the opportunity for making the briefest note. It must be owned, however, that as they were not garrulous, so they were not curious. It probably did not matter much that they very rarely spoke to each other. Their thoughts were so precisely alike that any conversation between them would have been little otherwise than a monologue. They had no interest to devote to the architectural peculiarities of the place; they admired neither the broad straight streets, nor the handsome houses, nor the shady promenades of the European quarter; still less had they the discrimination to observe that double aspect of character common to the majority of Chinese cities which appear as it were dead in the centre, but alive in all their surroundings.

As the steam-boat was about to proceed up the Han-

Kiang, navigable as far as Lao-Ho-Kow, another hundred miles, he determined to take his passage on board for the rest of the way. The two men in charge were very glad of the decision, chiefly because the dangers of the river were less than those of the road, and it was a mode of travelling that secured them greater facilities for keeping an effectual watch. Soon was still better satisfied. The steam-boat life suited him exactly. He had no walking, and no exertion in the way of work, for Craig and Fry still persisted in undertaking all personal attendance upon his master ; he slept all day long in a snug corner of the ship, taking, however, the most conscientious care to awake punctually at luncheon, dinner, tea, and supper, the good cooking of which he thoroughly appreciated.

In a day or so afterwards, an observable change in the ordinary food betokened that they had entered a more northerly latitude. In the place of rice, corn was served up in the form of unleavened bread, which, eaten fresh from the oven, is extremely palatable. Soon, a true southerner, was the first to miss his accustomed diet, and deplored the absence of the rice which he enjoyed, tossing it, by means of chop-sticks, into his capacious mouth. Give him his tea and his rice, and he was satisfied ; after all, he cared more for them than for the fine cookery of the hotel-ship.

They had, in fact, entered the corn district, the character

of the country being more undulated, and hills were to be seen on the horizon crested with fortifications erected under the dynasty of Ming. The river ceased to be bounded by artificial banks, but flowed between its natural shores, allowing the stream to be wider, but rendering it more shallow.

At the prefecture of Yuen-Lo-Foo the steamer lay to for a few hours, close to the custom-house, to take in fuel. Kin-Fo would not go on shore. Why should he? there was nothing in the place that he cared to see; his single aim now was to bury himself in the heart of China, where, if he did not come across Wang, Wang would not come across him.

Beyond Yuen-Lo-Foo lay two towns, facing each other, on opposite sides of the river; one being Fan-Tcheng with a large and bustling population, the other the prefecture of Siang-Yang-Foo, the residence of the authorities, but a place much more dead than alive. The river here took an abrupt turn to the north, in the direction of Lao-Ho-Kow, where it ceased to be navigable.

From this point onwards, travelling became altogether a different matter. The "smooth rolling road" of the river was henceforth to be exchanged for the rough and ill-kept highways of the land, and the gentle gliding of the steam-boat had to be surrendered for the bumping and jolting of the primitive vehicles which still seem to satisfy the



From this point onwards, travelling became altogether a different matter.

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requirements of the Celestials. Poor Soon! what a prospect for him! the change was to him little short of a calamity! He would have to trudge along, and had nothing to expect but fatigue for himself and chastisement from his master!

To own the truth, it was indeed no enviable post for any one to have to follow Kin-Fo in the wild peregrination on which he had set out. He had made up his mind to keep moving on; the mode of conveyance was not for a moment to be a consideration. From town to town he hurried, from province to province he made his way; at one time in a sort of chest nailed on to an axle, with the wheels attached most questionably to its ends, drawn by a couple of stubborn mules, and covered by a tilting that was proof neither against sun nor rain; at another time in a mule-chair, a kind of hammock suspended between two bamboo poles, in which he had to lie at full length, and submit to be pitched and tossed about with as much violence as if he were exposed to the fury of a boisterous sea.

Craig and Fry, mounted on wretched donkeys, the motion of which was scarcely less torturing than that of the mule-chair, rode one on each side, a duly constituted body-guard. Grumbling and growling, obliged to follow on foot, Soon came on behind, consoling himself, whenever he considered the pace immoderately rapid, by surreptitious sips of brandy, a refreshment that had the effect of giving

a peculiarity to his gait that was not altogether to be attributed to the unevenness of the road.

At a later stage the mules and donkeys were dismissed, and it was mounted on horses, albeit of the sorriest order, that Kin-Fo and his party entered Si-*Ngan-Foo*, the ancient capital of the Central Empire, and the residence of the Emperor of the Tang dynasty. Many and bare, however, were the plains they had to cross; long and severe the fatigue they had to endure before they reached this remote province of *Shen-See*.

The heat had been scarcely endurable. It was the month of May, and the latitude was about the same as that of southern Spain. A fine yellow dust rose in clouds from the unballasted highways, at once tainting the atmosphere with an unwholesome fog and covering the travellers from head to foot. It was the "*lœss*" district, which presents a geological formation peculiar to the north of China, and which has been described by *Léon Rousset* as "neither earth nor rock, but rather stone in that transitional state in which it has not yet had time to get solid."

Nor was the personal risk they ran by any means insignificant; the police themselves are in perpetual dread of the assassin's knife; and in a region where the people are afraid to walk by night in the towns, because the *ti-paos* give every rascal free field for action, it may well be understood that there was no security in the open country.



Mounted on horses, albeit of the sorriest order.

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Several times in the narrow defiles formed by the loess strata some suspicious-looking stragglers met them ; but, if they had any evil designs, the sight of the revolvers in the waistbands of Craig and Fry was probably enough to warn them off. Still it could not be concealed that the two men in charge were very anxious ; they were quite aware that the consequences to the Centenarian, in the service of which they were engaged, would be just the same whether Kin-Fo should be killed by Wang or by any chance highwayman they might encounter on the way. Nor was it to be denied that Kin-Fo was in no small degree alarmed on his own account. He was really solicitous for his own safety ; he had taken a new view of life and clung to it more than ever ; so that, as Craig and Fry, without much regard to logic, expressed their opinion, " he would have died to save it."

Nothing could be more improbable than that any trace of Wang should be discovered at Si-Ngan-Foo. It was precisely the spot to which no Tai-Ping would be likely to resort. At the time of the revolution the rebels had never succeeded in scaling its substantial wall, and a strong garrison of the Man-chows had always occupied it. If it could be supposed that the philosopher was in search of archæological curiosities, or was interested in the mysterious epigraphs, the number of which in the museum has caused it to be designated " the forest of tablets," he might

have been looked for in the locality ; otherwise there was every reason why he should avoid it.

The town is an important centre of business between Central Asia, Thibet and Mongolia, and China. It might well detain a traveller for a time, but Kin-Fo took his departure immediately after his arrival. Continuing his route northwards, he followed the valley of the Hoey-Ho, a stream of which the waters are tinged with yellow, communicated by the lœss through which it makes its way. He passed Kao-Lin-Sien and Sing-Tong-Sien and reached Hoa-Choo, the scene of a terrible Mussulman insurrection in 1860. Thence afterwards by an arduous journey, sometimes by carriage, sometimes by boat, he arrived at the fortress of Tong-Konan, at the confluence of the Hoey-Ho and Hoang-Ho.

The Hoang-Ho is the renowned Yellow River. Rising in the north, it flows through the eastern provinces into the Yellow Sea, which, however, is no more yellow than the Black Sea is black or the Red Sea red. Honoured with the name of the imperial colour, it is no doubt credited with a celestial origin, but its merits are somewhat qualified by the additional appellation which it bears of "the vexation of China," a title which has been bestowed upon it on account of the destructive inundations that have even affected the Imperial Canal.

As Tong-Konan was not a commercial city, but a mili-

tary station, ordinarily occupied by a detachment of the Manchow Tartars, a not unimportant part of the Chinese army, Kin-Fo's companions indulged a hope that he might wait there for a few days, provided he could find a comfortable hotel ; and it probably would have been so had it not been for an unlucky blunder on the part of Soon. Entirely off his guard, the stupid fellow gave his master's real name at the custom-house, forgetting altogether the assumed name of Ki-Nan. It was an act of carelessness that cost him a good piece of his pigtail, but the news he had communicated flew like wildfire. Kin-Fo had come ; the man who was going to live to a hundred was actually in the town. A crowd was quickly gathered round the traveller, who forthwith took to his heels, and, followed by the inseparables, never paused in his flight until he sank exhausted in an obscure little village, nearly twenty miles from Tong-Konan, and in which he hoped at least to secure his incognito.

The discomfiture which Soon had brought upon himself by his unwary slip was very considerable ; his master had been so annoyed by his servant's mistake that he had snipped off a very much larger piece of the pigtail than he had intended, and the fragment that remained to the culprit made him an object of ridicule to everybody in the place ; the very boys in the streets pursued and hooted him. It may well be imagined

that poor Soon longed heartily for an end to such a journey !

But where could the end be looked for ? Was not Kin-Fo resolved to carry out the purpose he had announced to Mr. Biddulph, and to keep going "straight ahead" ?

In the retired little place in which refuge had been found there were neither horses, donkeys, carriages, nor mule-chairs ; and yet it was necessary at once to proceed. The prospect before them seemed to allow no alternative but to walk. This was not at all according to Kin-Fo's taste, for however determined he might be to go forward, it had never entered into his calculation to go far on foot. It is not to be denied that he displayed very little philosophy on the occasion ; he fretted, he fumed, he blamed those about him ; he blamed the world, although he might have known that he had only himself to blame ; he sighed after the past, in which he had nothing to disturb him ; he declared that, if troubles and annoyances were necessary to make a man appreciate comforts, he had surely had troubles and annoyances enough for a lifetime. And what had he not witnessed ? Had he not seen men without a sapeck in the world going on their way perfectly happy ? Had he not seen labourers toiling on merry and gay over their furrows in the fields ? Had he not seen the artisans plying their tools and singing the merriest of songs ? Perhaps, after all, it was work that was wanted to give genuine

happiness to existence. At any rate, he came to the conclusion that his own was a hard and bitter lot.

Meanwhile Craig and Fry had ransacked the village for a conveyance. They had been reduced to the very extremity of despair, when at last they managed to secure a vehicle that would just convey a single passenger ; but though they found the vehicle, they were not fortunate enough to get the means for moving it.

The carriage in question was neither more nor less than an ordinary wheelbarrow of the country—the wheelbarrow of Pascal, probably invented long before his time by the discoverers of gunpowder and of the mariner's compass. In these barrows the wheel is not placed at the extremity of the shafts, but in the middle of them, working underneath the body. The truck part is thus divided into two compartments, one of which may be assigned to a passenger, the other to his luggage. The driver pushes in the ordinary way from behind, and like the driver of a Hansom cab, does not impede the front view of his fare. As an appliance that is frequently found of great service, a square sail can be hoisted on a mast, and when the wind is in a favourable quarter, the impulse thus given to locomotion is occasionally considerably greater than the most impatient traveller could desire.

Not to be hired, the wheelbarrow with all its appur-

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tenances had to be purchased; and all arrangements being duly made, Kin-Fo took his place inside.

"Now then, Soon!" he said.

"Quite ready, sir!" answered Soon, taking measures for stowing himself in the vacant compartment of the barrow.

"No, no; the luggage goes there!" shouted Kin-Fo.

"And I?" asked the astounded valet.

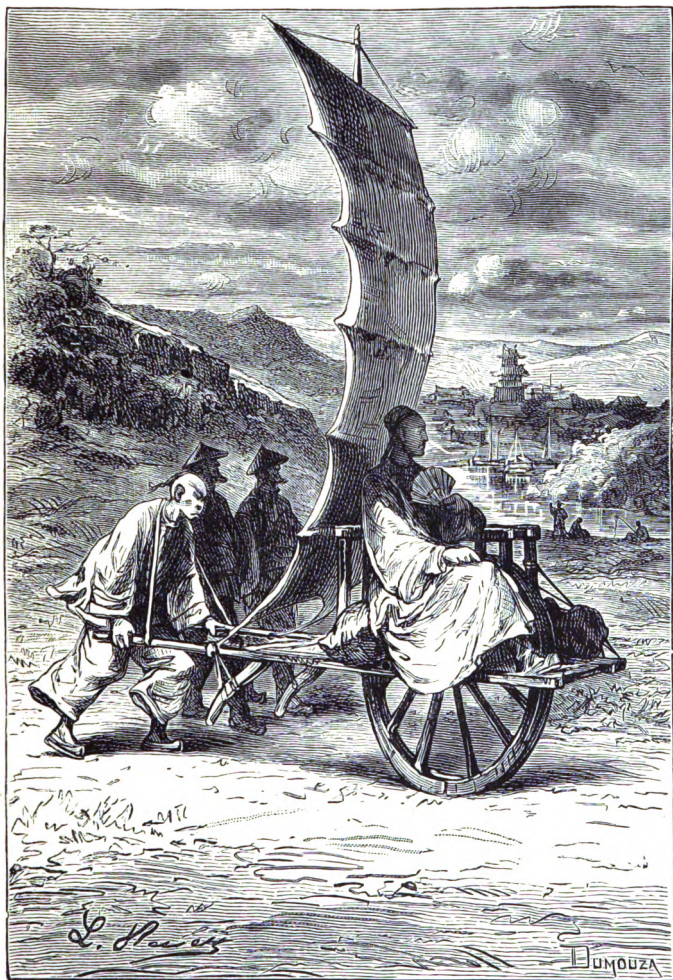
"To the shafts, man, to the shafts!" cried his master.

"How? what? where?" stammered out the poor fellow, utterly bewildered, his legs already tottering under him like a worn-out race-horse.

"Do you hear me?" said Kin-Fo, making his first two fingers gape out and shut like a pair of scissors, a gesture which Soon understood only too well.

Without another word the servant passed the barrow-yoke over his shoulders, and grasped the handles at the shaft-ends. The wind was in the right direction, and the sail was accordingly hoisted; Craig and Fry took their places on either side, and a start was made at a brisk trot.

At first Soon's rage and mortification were unbounded at finding himself thus summarily reduced to the level of a cab-horse, and he flinched at the arduous task before him; but his humiliation was qualified when he found Craig and Fry willing to take their turn at pushing, and the actual toil was so materially lightened by the action of



A start was made at a brisk trot.

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the southerly wind, that the work of the man in the shafts was really little more than that of a helmsman.

In this fashion, walking when he wanted to stretch his legs, and riding when he was tired, Kin-Fo pushed on towards the north. Avoiding Honan-Foo and Cafong, he followed the course of the Imperial Canal, which, until twenty years ago, when the Yellow River resumed its ancient bed, formed a highway many hundred miles in length between the tea-district and the capital. Passing through Tsinan and Ho-Kien, he entered the province of Pe-Chi-Li, and proceeded towards Peking.

On his way he passed through Tien-Tsin, a large place of some four hundred thousand inhabitants, defended by an entrenched wall and two forts. The wide harbour of this city is formed by the junction of the Pei-Ho and the Imperial Canal, and accommodates ships that bring business to the amount of some millions annually, the exports being jujubes, nenuphar-leaves, and tobacco from Tartary, with other oriental products; the imports being of a very miscellaneous character, sandal-wood, minerals, wool, and notably calico from Lancashire.

Interesting, however, as was the place, Kin-Fo had no intention of stopping there; he neither spared time to visit the renowned Pagoda of Infernal Punishment, nor did he take a single stroll along the animated "Street of Lanterns;" he did not take a meal at the celebrated

restaurant of "Harmony and Friendship," kept by the Mussulman Leon-Lao-Ki, whose wines, in spite of Mussulman law, are in high repute ; and he declined the ceremony of presenting his red card at the palace of Li-Tchong-Tang, since 1870 Viceroy of the Province, member of the Privy Council, and of the High Council of the Empire, and who wears the yellow robe, and bears the title of Fei-Tze-Chao-Pao.

None of these things had any attraction for Kin-Fo, who hurried on without pausing. He passed along the quays, where salt was piled up high, sack over sack ; he crossed the suburbs, the English and American quarters, the race-course ; he made his way onwards through vineyards and market-gardens, rich in their supplies of fruit and vegetables ; again he reached the open country with its fields of sorghum, barley, and sesame, traversing the open plains where hares, partridges, quails in thousands fell victims to the sparrow-hawk and falcon.

There was now before them a long paved road of nearly sixty miles, bordered on one side by many varieties of trees, fringed on the other by the tall rushes that overhang the river. It would bring them straight to Peking ; but they halted on the way at Tong-Choo, Kin-Fo none the worse for his undignified journey, Craig and Fry fresh as when they started, Soon limping and dusty, but most of all concerned at the diminution

of his pigtail, reduced to the measurement of but a few inches.

It was now the 19th of June. There were yet six days of suspense. Hitherto, however, there was no trace of Wang. Where could he be?

CHAPTER XIII.

AN EXCITING CHASE.

WHEN Kin-Fo in his wheelbarrow reached Tong-Choo, about ten miles short of Peking, he announced his intention of staying there until after the period of his contract with Wang had expired.

"In a town of four hundred thousand people," he said, "I ought to be safe ; but Soon must take care to remember that he is in the service of Ki-Nan, a merchant from the province of Shen-See."

Soon protested that he was not very likely to forget his instructions a second time ; his former blunder had entailed too much labour on him for him to repeat it, and he hoped Kin-Fo ("Ki-Nan," interposed Craig and Fry with one accord) would reinstate him in his proper position, and not compel him any more to work like a horse ; he was, he declared, "dead beat," and he trusted that Kin-Fo ("Ki-Nan," again exclaimed Craig and Fry, as if they had only one tongue between them) would give him a good

eight-and-forty hours to go to sleep and recover his strength.

“Go to bed for a week, if you will,” answered his master ;
“for the more you sleep, the less you will chatter.”

There are plenty of hotels in the place, and Kin-Fo's next concern was to select the one which would serve his purpose best. The town is, in fact, an immense suburb of Peking, the paved road which joins the two places being bordered with an almost unbroken line of villas, farms, and paddocks, the intercourse between which is so frequent as to occasion a traffic of vehicles, horsemen, and passengers quite incessant.

Not unacquainted with the place, Kin-Fo made his way to the Tai-Wang-Mia, or “temple of the reigning princes,” formerly a religious establishment, but recently converted into a hotel, and offering very desirable quarters to strangers. He engaged apartments for himself and a room for Craig and Fry close adjoining. Suitable accommodation was found for Soon, who immediately took possession and became invisible for a time.

After an hour's rest and a substantial luncheon, the three felt quite refreshed, and started off to look about them. It was suggested that they should get a local newspaper, just to see whether it contained any information that concerned themselves ; accordingly, with Kin-Fo in the middle, carefully guarded as usual, they passed along the narrow

streets, allowing no one to come unnecessarily near them. The paper, the *Official Gazette*, was duly obtained at the office down by the harbour, but beyond the advertisement still offering the reward of two thousand dollars for the discovery of Wang, it contained nothing of any personal interest.

"Not found yet," said Kin-Fo ; "where can he be?"

"Do you really suppose he has any intention of abiding by the terms of his contract?" asked Craig and Fry.

"Why should I question it?" replied Kin-Fo ; "he knows nothing whatever of my change of circumstances, and consequently does not suspect any change of mind on my part ; for the next six days there is no reason why my life should be in less danger than ever."

"You must exercise special caution," they said.

"How so?" inquired Kin-Fo.

Craig and Fry united in representing that there were three distinct lines of action open to him ; he might shut himself up and decline on any pretext to leave the private room in the hotel ; he might get himself arrested, and so secure the safest of quarters inside a gaol ; or thirdly, he might give out that he was dead, and not return to life again until the danger was overpast.

Neither of the proposals commended itself at all to Kin-Fo ; without a moment's hesitation he rejected them all, knowing well enough that Wang, if he were destined

to fulfil his undertaking, would with equal ease penetrate the hotel, the prison, or the tomb.

"No," said he ; " I shall enjoy my liberty."

Craig and Fry looked doubtful, and were about to remonstrate.

"I shall do as I choose, gentlemen," he added in the most decided tone ; " the two hundred thousand dollars which you are sent to protect must remain at stake."

"We must do our duty by the office," they said.

"And I shall do my duty to myself in my own way. Don't forget that my interest is many times larger than yours. However, take my advice, and keep your eyes open ; do your best to protect me, and trust me to do what I can to protect myself."

There was no more to be said or done ; they could only resolve to use all possible vigilance, quite aware that for the next few days the task assigned them was at its crisis.

As Tong-Choo is one of the most ancient cities of the Celestial Empire, so it has grown into being one of the most populous. Situated upon an arm of the Pei-Ho that has been converted into a canal, close to its junction with another canal connecting it with Peking, it forms the centre of a large traffic. The travellers could not fail to be struck, not only with the bustling crowds upon the quay, but with the immense number of sampans and trading-junks lying in the harbour.

The very presence of a crowd gave Craig and Fry a certain feeling of security. According to their conjectures, Wang would perpetrate his deed, if he could, in solitude, and leaving the document on the body he had slain, would provide that there should be every appearance of the victim having committed suicide. Coming, therefore, to the conclusion that there was nothing to fear in the public thoroughfares of a crowded city, they merely scrutinized the faces of the passers-by, expecting nothing of importance to occur.

All at once Kin-Fo came to a standstill. He listened and listened again. He was not mistaken. A lot of boys were playing antics in the streets, and were shouting out his own name. The sound startled him; he looked confused; his guardians pressed closer to his side. Was it possible he had been recognized? There was no appearance of that. It was clear at once that he was not himself an object of attraction. But the name was repeated again and again, "Kin-Fo! Kin-Fo!"

He waited quietly, curious to know the meaning of the commotion.

A crowd of men, women, and children was collecting round an itinerant singer, and applauding him vehemently, even before he commenced his performance.

As soon as he found himself surrounded by an audience sufficiently large to satisfy him, he drew from his pocket a

packet of gaily painted leaflets, and began shouting in a stentorian voice,—

“The five watches of a centenarian! The five watches of a centenarian!”

Here then was the explanation of the concourse. The strolling singer was hawking about the popular song of the day of which Kin-Fo was himself the burden. Craig and Fry tried to draw him out of the way, but he was not to be moved from the spot; he had never heard the song, and made up his mind to hear it now; nobody knew him, he argued, and stay he would.

After a few preliminary grimaces the vocalist commenced,—

“Dawneth the first watch; o’er Shang-Hai
The pale young moon sheds soften’d ray;
A willow-sprout,
Just budding out,
Kin-Fo is twenty now!

“Dawneth the second; clear and fair,
The moon lights up the yamen there;
Rolling in wealth,
With friends, with health,
Kin-Fo is forty now!

The singer altered his expression, making himself look older after each stanza. The crowd applauded rapturously.

“Dawneth the third watch ; beaming bright
The moon displays her fullest light ;
But autumn sere
Must soon appear :
Kin-Fo is sixty now !

“Dawneth the fourth watch ; in the west
The waning moon proceeds to rest ;
A shrivell'd shrimp,
Pucker'd and limp,
Kin-Fo is eighty now !

“Dawneth the fifth watch ; chill and drear,
The moon is dark, no stars appear,
Ready to die,
Without a sigh,
Kin-Fo's a hundred now !

“Breaketh the morn ; King Ien complains,
Kin-Fo's too old for his domains ;
From heaven shut out,
Still roams about
For ever poor Kin-Fo !”

The song over, the applause grew perfectly deafening, and the audience proceeded to show their satisfaction by purchasing scores of copies at three sapecks apiece.

Kin-Fo saw no reason why he too should not buy a copy. Taking several small coins from his pocket, he was about handing them to the singer, when the sight of a face in the crowd startled him, and he gave a loud exclamation of surprise. The two men by his side grasped him

securely, and seemed to suspect he had received the fatal blow.

“Wang!” cried Kin-Fo.

“Wang! where?” asked Craig.

“Where?” repeated Fry.

Kin-Fo was not mistaken. Wang was not only there, but had recognized Kin-Fo. Instead, however, of rushing towards him to do a deed of violence, he turned round abruptly, dashed through the crowd, and started off with all his speed. Evidently the surprise was mutual.

Not an instant did Kin-Fo hesitate, but set off in pursuit, the two attendants keeping close behind.

Again and again he shouted, but in vain.

“Wang! Wang!” he called out, “I am all right now; my property is all safe. Wang! Wang, I want you!”

Craig and Fry tried hard to make him hear, but he was much too far ahead to understand their meaning.

Rushing off the quay, and along the side of the canal, he went at such a pace that those who were giving chase failed to gain upon him in the least.

Some five or six Chinese and two tipaos at first began running behind, evidently supposing that they were after a thief trying to escape; but they quickly swelled into a crowd; the name of Wang soon caught the ear of the multitude; the very man for whom the large reward had so long been offered; the excitement at once grew intense;

and howling, screaming, shouting, an enormous throng took up the chase.

They ran hard ; they were spurred on to run each by his own incitement. Was not Kin-Fo running at least for a fortune of 800,000 dollars, if not for his very life ? Had not Craig and Fry the responsibility of 200,000 dollars upon their hands ? And did not every individual of the teeming crowd expect to win the 2000 dollars advertised for the reward ?

“Wang ! Wang !” was the cry rising ever louder and louder.

“Wang ! I am rich now !” gasped Kin-Fo.

“Richer than ever !” cried Craig and Fry.

“Stop him ! stop him !” bawled the mob.

But Wang either heard or would hear nothing. With his elbows tightly pressed into his sides, he kept on his way, not even turning his head. Getting free of the suburb, he found himself upon an open way, with nothing to impede him. Accordingly he redoubled his efforts, and the crowd in pursuit had to exert themselves in proportion.

With unabated vigour the chase was maintained for more than a quarter of an hour, but the fugitive at length became aware of symptoms of exhaustion, and knew that the distance between himself and his pursuers was sensibly diminishing. To out-distance them by speed he felt was



The race could not last long now.

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a vain hope ; he must have recourse to stratagem ; seizing his first chance, he suddenly made a dart to the right, and disappeared behind the green enclosure of a small pagoda.

“ Ten thousand taels to the first man that catches him ! ” cried Kin-Fo.

“ Ten thousand taels ! ” repeated Craig and Fry.

“ Ya, ya, ya ! ” roared the foremost of the mob as they turned the corner of the pagoda wall.

Wang for the moment was out of sight. The crowd hesitated, but in another second the shout rose high.

“ There he is ! ”

He was making for a narrow cross-path by the side of one of the little canals that serve for irrigation ; suddenly he took another turn, but it only brought him back to the open road, where once again it was a mere trial of speed. Manifestly he was aware of his own failing powers, and repeatedly turned his head as if to measure the interval that separated him from those behind. It was clear enough that the race could not last long now. The younger men were certain to get the best of it in the end.

Just a little way ahead was the spot where the river is crossed by the famous bridge of Palikao, a magnificent work of art with marble balustrades, decorated with a double row of gigantic lions. Eighteen years before, it

would not have been possible for them thus to enter the province of Pe-Chi-Li ; the road was blocked by fugitives of another character. It was here, on the 21st of September, 1860, that, repulsed by the French forces, the army of San-Ko-Li-Tsin, uncle of the Emperor, made a stand, and the Manchow Tartars, in spite of the daring engendered by their fatalism, were hewn down by European artillery.

But the bridge, although its statues still bore traces of the war, was free for passage now. Wang, only too conscious that his footsteps were faltering, and that his strength was failing, cast another rapid glance at his pursuers ; the interval, a moment ago some twenty paces, was now not more than ten. He, for his part, could almost feel their grasp upon him ; they, for their part, need not waste their breath in shouting ; they should make him their captive in another minute. The chase was over.

Not at all. Never was expectation more bitterly disappointed. The next moment Wang was on the parapet of the bridge ; the next, he was under the waters of the Pei-Ho.

Staggered for the instant, Kin-Fo's resolution was soon taken.

"We must have him yet !" he cried, and flung himself down into the stream.

"Two hundred thousand dollars in the water !" ex-



Kin-Fo's resolution was soon taken.

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claimed Craig and Fry, and threw themselves down in sheer desperation.

And in the strange excitement there were several of the volunteers, who could not restrain themselves from following the example.

Yet quite in vain. They searched and searched ; but to no purpose. What conclusion could be formed except that the poor philosopher had been carried down the flood, and so had perished ? But the mystery still remained which none could solve, why should he put an end to his existence thus ?

Weary, bewildered, vexed, disheartened, Kin-Fo, with Craig and Fry, returned to the hotel. They dried their clothes, procured some refreshment, and summoned Soon, to whose intense annoyance they announced that in another hour they were to start for Peking.

CHAPTER XIV.

PEKING.

PE-CHI-LI, the most northerly of the eighteen provinces of China, is divided into nine departments. The capital of one of these departments is Chum-Kin-Fo, a "Celestial town" of the first rank, the city of Peking.

If the fragments of a Chinese puzzle could be supposed to be arranged so as to form a perfect rectangle, covering a surface of more than 135,000 acres, some idea might be gained of the mysterious Kambaloo, of which Marco Polo gave such a remarkable description towards the end of the thirteenth century, and which is the present capital of the Celestial Empire.

Peking really contains two distinct towns, separated by a wide rampart and fortified wall ; one, the Chinese section, is a rectangular parallelogram ; the other, the Tartar, is almost a perfect square, and is again subdivided into Hoang-Tching, the yellow town, and Tsen-Kin-Tching, the red or forbidden town.

Formerly the city had a population in the aggregate of more than two millions, but the emigration that ensued in consequence of the extreme misery, has reduced that number to little more than a million; these are chiefly Tartars and Chinese, with whom must be reckoned about 10,000 Mussulmans, and a considerable sprinkling of Mongols and Thibetians, who form the floating population.

The Tartar city is enclosed with a fortified wall, forty to fifty feet wide, and the same in height, and faced with brick. At intervals of every two hundred yards, there is a projecting tower, and at each corner an enormous bastion, which forms a guard-room, the whole affording a magnificent promenade, fifteen miles in length. Such is the defence within which the Emperor, "the son of heaven," resides.

Within the Tartar city lies the Yellow town, covering an area of 1500 acres, and entered by eight gateways. Its chief points of interest are an enormous pyramid of coal, three hundred feet high; a handsome canal, called the "Central Sea," spanned by a marble bridge; two convents for bonzes; a pagoda for examinations; the Pei-tha-se, a religious establishment built upon a peninsula that overhangs the clear waters of the canal; the Peh-Tang, the quarters of the Catholic Missionaries; the Imperial pagoda, with its sonorous bells and bright blue tiles; the

great temple dedicated to the ancestors of the reigning dynasty; the temple of Spirits; the temple of the Genius of the Winds; the temple of the Genius of the Thunder-bolt; the temple of the Discoverer of Silk; the temple of the Ruler of Heaven; the five pavilions of the dragons; and the monastery of Eternal Rest.

In the heart of the Yellow town lies what is known as the Forbidden town. This covers an area of 180 acres, and is surrounded by a moat, crossed by seven marble bridges.

It is almost needless to say, that as the reigning dynasty is of Manchow origin, the whole of this quarter of Peking is mainly inhabited by people of the same race, the Chinese being confined to their own town on the other side of the ramparts.

The Forbidden city is surrounded by red brick walls crowned with yellow tiles. It is entered by the Gate of Great Purity, which is only opened for an Emperor or Empress. Within are the temple of the ancestors of the Tartar dynasty, with a double roof of variegated tiles; Che and Tsi, the temples consecrated to spirits celestial and terrestrial; the Palace of Sovereign Concord, reserved for state ceremonies and official banquets; the Palace of Intermediate Concord, where may be seen the genealogical tables of the "Son of Heaven;" and the Palace of Protecting Concord, of which the central hall is occupied by

the Imperial throne. Then there is the pavilion of Nei-ko, where the great council of the Empire is held, under the presidency of Prince Kong, the minister of foreign affairs, and uncle to the late sovereign;¹ the pavilion of the Flowers of Literature, whither the Emperor repairs once a year to interpret the sacred books; the pavilion of Tchooan-Sin-Tien, where sacrifices are offered in honour of Confucius; the Imperial library; the offices of historians; the Voo-Igne-Tien, where the wooden and copper plates used for printing are carefully preserved; and the workshops where the court garments are concocted. Then might be seen the Palace of Celestial Purity, used for the discussion of family affairs; the Palace of the Terrestrial Element, where the young Empress was installed; the Palace of Meditation, to which the sovereign retires when he is ill; the three palaces where the Emperor's children are brought up; the four palaces reserved for the widow

¹ An anecdote of Prince Kong, related by M. T. Choutzé in his work entitled "Peking and the North of China," is worth repeating:—"In 1870, the year when France was being ravaged by a bloody war, Prince Kong had occasion to visit all the foreign diplomatic representatives in China. By the Comte de Rochechouart, the French ambassador, he was informed of the disaster of Sedan, the news of which had just been received. Calling one of the officers of his suite, Prince Kong told him to take his card to the Prussian Embassy, and to say that he would not call until the following day; then, turning to the Comte de Rochechouart, he said, 'I cannot congratulate the representative of Prussia on the same day that I am offering my condolences to the representative of France.'"

and court-ladies of Hien-Fong, who died in 1861; the Tchou-Sicou-Kong, the residence of the Emperor's wives; the Palace of Proffered Favours, where the court-ladies hold their official receptions; the Palace of General Tranquillity, a strange name to be applied to a school for the children of the superior officers; the Palace of Purification and Fasting; and the Palace of the Purity of Jade, occupied by the princes of the blood-royal. There were the temples dedicated to departed ancestors, to the presiding deity of the town, and another of Thibetian architecture; there were the Imperial stores and offices; the Lao-Kong-Choo, the residence of the eunuchs, of which there are no less than 5000 in the Red town; and many other palaces besides, making a total of forty-eight within the Imperial enclosure, not including the Tzen-Kooang-Ko, the Pavilion of Purple Light, on the borders of the lake of the Yellow town, where on June 19th, 1873, the Ambassadors of England, Russia, Prussia, Holland, and the United States, were admitted into the presence of the Emperor. The Wan-Cheoo-Chan, too, should not be omitted from the summary. This is the Summer Palace, and is situated about five miles from Peking. It was destroyed in 1860, and among its ruins the garden of Calm and Perfect Light, the mound of the Source of Jade, and the hill of Ten Thousand Lives, can hardly be discerned.

Never did an ancient town exhibit an agglomerate of

buildings with forms so varied, and contents so rare ; never has any European capital been able to boast a nomenclature so strangely fantastic.

In the Tartar city around the Yellow town are the English, French, and Russian Embassies, the Hospital of the London Mission, the Catholic Mission-houses, and the old stables for the elephants, the sole surviving representative of which is a hundred years old, and blind with one eye. Besides these there is the clock-tower, its red roof edged with green tiles ; the temple of Confucius ; the convent of the Thousand Lamas ; the temple of Fa-qua ; the old Observatory with its great square tower ; the yamen of the Jesuits, and that of the Literates, where the examinations are held. On the east and west are triumphal arches, and two canals, called the Sea of the North and the Sea of Reeds, carpeted with blue water-lilies, flow down from the Summer Palace, and join the great canal in the town. Here, too, are more palaces appropriated to the ministers of finance, ceremonies, war, public works, and foreign affairs ; and there is also a court of accounts, an astronomical tribunal, and an academy of medicine. The place is a strange medley of poverty and grandeur. On either hand of the narrow streets are lines of houses of the most meagre and miserable description, broken here and there by the stately mansion of some high dignitary, shaded by tall and handsome trees. The streets them-

selves are intolerably dusty in the summer, whilst in the winter they are little better than running streams. The thoroughfares are constantly crowded with stray dogs, Mongolian camels laden with coals, palanquins with four or eight bearers, according to the rank of the occupant, chairs, mule-carts, and carriages. The beggars are estimated by M. Choutzé as over 70,000 in number, and M. P. Arène has given his testimony that in parts of the foul and muddy streets the puddles are so deep, that it is not at all a rare occurrence for a blind vagrant to be drowned in them.

The Chinese town, or Vai-Cheng, as it is called, in some respects resembles the Tartar portion of Peking. The two most famous temples are those dedicated to heaven and to agriculture, which occupy the southern district of the town, and to these may be added the temples of the Goddess Koanine, of the Genius of the World, of Purification, of the Black Dragon, and of the Spirits of Heaven and Earth. Other points of interest are the ponds of the Gold Fish, the monastery of Fayooan-Se, and the markets and theatres.

One great artery, called the Grand Avenue, runs through the town from north to south, from the Tien gateway to that of Hoong-Ting. Crossing it at right angles is another still longer street, running from the Cha-Cooa gateway on the east, to the Cooan-Tsu gateway on the west. This is the Cha-Cooa Avenue, and about a hundred yards from

its intersection with the Grand Avenue, was the residence of the lady whom Kin-Fo hoped to make his wife.

It will be remembered that a few days after the arrival of the letter announcing his first reverse of fortune, the young widow had received another informing her that affairs had changed, and that the seventh moon would not pass away before her "beloved elder brother" should have returned to her. Since that date, the 17th of May, she had never received another word. Several times she had written to Shang-Hai, but Kin-Fo was absent on his mad-cap journey, and of course her letter remained unanswered. Her uneasiness may be more easily imagined than described when the 19th of June arrived, and still no news. All through those long weary days La-oo had never left her house; her anxiety became more and more intense, and old mother Nan, who seemed to grow, if possible, more disagreeable than ever, was not at all a cheering companion for her solitude.

Although the religion of Lao-Tse is the oldest religion in China (having been promulgated 500 years before the Christian era), and, although that of Confucius, almost contemporary with it, is professed by the Emperor, the literates, and the chief mandarins, yet Buddhism, or the religion of Fo, attracts the largest number of believers. Its votaries, in China and elsewhere, form the largest

religious body in the world, and number as many as 300,000,000 people.

The Buddhists are divided into two distinct sects, the one served by bonzes, who wear grey robes and red caps, the other by lamas, who are clad from head to foot in yellow.

La-oo was a Buddhist of the former sect, and consequently a frequent visitor to the temple of Koan-Ti-Miao, dedicated to the goddess Koanine. There, prostrate on the temple floor, she would burn her offerings of little perfumed sticks, and pour forth her supplications for her lover's welfare.

To-day she had a kind of presentiment that some danger was pending over him, and accordingly determined to go and intercede with the goddess in his behalf. Summoning mother Nan, she ordered her to call a sedan-chair from the corner of the Grand Avenue. The old woman made no reply, but with a contemptuous shrug of her shoulders, shuffled away to obey her mistress's commands.

While she was gone, the young widow cast a melancholy glance at the phonograph, now for so many days silent and unused.

"At any rate," she said to herself, "he shall know that I have never forgotten him ; my thoughts shall be registered to repeat to him on his return."

And setting the cylinder in motion, La-oo uttered aloud

the most tender and loving phrases that her heart could dictate. Her monologue was interrupted by Nan, who, entering abruptly, announced that the chair was at the door, at the same time taking occasion to add that she should have thought that her mistress would have been better at home.

Her remonstrance had no effect; La-oo left her to grumble by herself, and taking her seat in the sedan, ordered the bearers to take her to the Koan-Ti-Miao.

The way to the temple was direct enough, being only straight up the Grand Avenue as far as the Tien gateway, but the progress thither was a matter of no small difficulty. It was the most populous part of the capital, and this was just the busiest time of the day. The noise and bustle were immense, and the booths of the itinerant dealers who lined the road gave the avenue the aspect of being one great fair. Public orators, readers, fortune-tellers, photographers, and caricaturists, who ridiculed the mandarins, all joined their voices to the general hubbub. At one time a pompous funeral sorely impeded the traffic; at another a wedding procession, not so gay as the funeral perhaps, but causing a similar block in the street. A crowd would be assembled before some magistrate's yamen, where a suppliant was beating the drum as the signal that he was demanding the intervention of justice. On the "Leo-Ping" stone a criminal was kneeling ready for the

bastonade, closely guarded by policemen with their Manchow caps with red tassels, carrying their short pike and a couple of sabres all in the same sheath. Farther on might be seen some refractory Chinamen on their way to chastisement tied together by their pigtails. Farther on again, a poor wretch was hobbling along with his left hand and right foot thrust through two holes bored in a plank; then was seen a thief, confined in a wooden box, from which only his head protruded, an object for public charity, and after him would come some other criminals yoked together by the cangue like so many oxen.

All these resorted to the more crowded thoroughfares in the hope of gaining a harvest from the passers-by, to the disadvantage of the regular mendicants of all sorts, maimed, lame, paralytic, and blind, or with a thousand other infirmities either real or pretended, who infest the cities of the Empire of Flowers.

The sedan-chair advanced but slowly, the traffic rather increasing than diminishing as it approached the outer rampart. At last the bearers stopped within a bastion that defended the gateway close to the temple of Koanine. La-oo alighted and entered the temple. She first knelt, and then prostrated herself before the statue of the goddess. Then rising she made her way to an apparatus that was known as a "praying-mill." It was a kind of windlass with eight branches, each bearing a scroll inscribed with sacred



She first knelt, and then prostrated herself before the statue of the goddess.

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La-oo wound on for nearly a quarter of an hour.

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sentences. A bonze was in attendance, ready to superintend the devotions and receive the offerings of believers. La-oo handed the minister of Buddha several taels, and placing her left hand on her heart, began to turn the handle of the machine gently with her right. Probably she did not work hard enough for her prayers to be successful, for the bonze with an encouraging look said, "Faster! faster!"

La-oo wound on for nearly a quarter of an hour, at the end of which time the bonze informed her that her supplications had been favourably received. After prostrating herself again before the image of the goddess, she left the temple, and, re-entering her chair, prepared to return home.

But just as she turned into the Grand Avenue, her bearers were roughly pushed aside. The soldiers were clearing the streets with brutal violence, the shops were all being closed by order, and the side streets were being barricaded with blue hangings under the superintendence of tipaas.

A procession had already entered the Avenue. The Emperor Koang-Sin, or as his name signifies, the "Continuation of glory," was on his way back to his Tartar city, and the central gate was to be opened to admit him. Two mounted police headed the cortège, followed in the first place by a troop of pioneers, then by a troop of pike-

bearers with staves in their shoulder-belts. Next came a group of officers of high rank carrying a great yellow umbrella, ornamented with the figure of a dragon, which is the emperor's emblem, the phoenix being that of the Empress. These were immediately followed by the palanquin borne by sixteen bearers in red robes embroidered with white roses, and waistcoats of twilled silk. The princes of the blood and other dignitaries formed an escort to the Imperial carriage, all of them being mounted on horses with trappings of yellow silk as the sign of their exalted rank. The hangings of the palanquin, also of yellow silk, were slightly raised, exhibiting, in a half recumbent posture, the "Son of Heaven" himself, the cousin of the late Emperor Tong-Tche, the nephew of Prince Kong. A number of extra grooms and bearers brought up the rear of the procession, which soon disappeared through the Tien gateway, much to the relief of the various merchants, beggars, and others, whose business had been so unceremoniously interrupted by its passage.

La-oo's chair was now able to proceed, and ultimately deposited her safely at the door of her own house, from which she had been absent about two hours. What a surprise the goddess Koanine had prepared for her!

Just as she alighted, a carriage covered in dust, and

drawn by two mules, drew up at the door, and Kin-Fo, followed by Craig, Fry, and Soon, stepped out.

"You, Kin-Fo! is it you? Can I believe my eyes?" exclaimed La-oo.

"It is I, my beloved little sister: did you think I was never coming!" Kin-Fo replied.

La-oo said nothing, but taking him by the hand, led him alone into her boudoir, up to the little phonograph, which had been the secret receptacle of all her troubles.

"Listen," she said, "and you shall hear that I have never ceased to think of you."

As she spoke, she touched the spring, and set the cylinder in motion. Kin-Fo heard the sound of a gentle voice repeating the words which La-oo had uttered a short time previously.

"Come back, beloved brother, come back to me! Let our hearts be united as the twin stars of the Shepherd and the Lyre. My thoughts are ever fixed on thy return. . . ."

For an instant the instrument was silent, but only for an instant. Almost immediately its sounds were heard again, this time in shrill and quavering tones:—

"As if a mistress were not bad enough in a house, I am to have a master too. Prince Ien strangle them both!"

The explanation was easy to find. Old Nan had

continued her grumbling after La-oo's departure, little dreaming that the instrument, still in motion, was registering her unwary words.

Men-servants and maid-servants, beware of phonographs! That very day Nan received notice to quit, nor was the seventh moon allowed to expire before she was forced to turn her back upon the house.

CHAPTER XV.

A CONTRETEMPS.

EVERY obstacle to Kin-Fo's marriage with La-oo was now removed. It was true that the time allowed for Wang to fulfil his pledge had not yet expired ; but the unfortunate philosopher had fallen a victim as the result of his mysterious flight, and further danger was not to be feared from him. The 25th of June, the very day on which at one time Kin-Fo had wished to end his existence, was fixed for the wedding.

La-oo had of course been informed of the various vicissitudes which her lover had experienced since he had sent her his refusal either to make her the participator of his poverty, or to run the risk of leaving her a widow, and she was well aware of the altered circumstances that had led him once more to come and claim her as his bride. She could not restrain her tears when she heard of Wang's death. She had known the

M

philosopher and esteemed him, and he had moreover been her first confidant of her sentiments towards Kin-Fo.

"Poor Wang," she said, "we shall miss him at our wedding."

"Yes, poor Wang," repeated Kin-Fo ; "but you must remember," he added, "that he had sworn to kill me."

La-oo shook her pretty little head.

"No, no," she said, "he would never have done that. I believe he drowned himself in the Pei-Ho, for the very purpose of evading his promise."

Kin-Fo could not but own that her hypothesis was probable. He, too, regretted the faithful companion of his youth ; his memory would be long in fading from either of their hearts.

It is almost needless to say that after the catastrophe on the bridge of Palikao, Biddulph's sensational paragraphs in the newspapers were discontinued, and the name of Kin-Fo sank into oblivion almost as speedily as it had risen into notoriety. The services of Craig and Fry were no longer in such urgent requisition. It is true that they were bound to defend the interests of the Centenarian until the 30th, the date of the expiration of the policy, but there was now no demand for the same measure of unremitted vigilance. Fear of attack from Wang had passed away, and there was no probability that Kin-Fo

would lay violent hands on himself ; his desire now was to live as long as possible.

But Kin-Fo did not care to give them an abrupt dismissal. If their services had not been disinterested, they had at least been conscientious, and he therefore begged them to stay over his marriage festivities, an invitation which they were very pleased to accept.

"Marriage is a kind of suicide," was Fry's jesting remark to Craig.

"It is a surrender of one's life, at all events," was Craig's reply.

Old Nan was soon replaced in La-oo's household, by a domestic of more agreeable disposition. Loo-ta-loo, an aunt of La-oo's, of mature age, had come to stay with her, and act a mother's part at the time of her marriage. She was the wife of a second-class mandarin of the fourth rank, with the blue button (formerly an Imperial reader, and member of the Academy of the Han-lin), apparently possessing every quality for performing her office in a manner worthy of the occasion.

It was Kin-Fo's intention to leave Peking immediately after his marriage, as besides his objection to residing in the vicinity of the Imperial Court, he felt anxious to see his young wife properly installed as mistress of the sumptuous yamen at Shang-Hai. Meantime he took temporary apartments in the Tien-Foo-Tang, or temple of celestial

happiness, a very comfortable hotel and restaurant near the Tien-Men rampart, between the Chinese and Tartar towns. Craig and Fry were lodged in the same quarters. Soon had returned to his duties, but although he was always grumbling, he took care first of all to assure himself that there was no phonograph at hand. The fate of old mother Nan was a warning to him to be cautious.

Kin-Fo had the pleasure of meeting two of his Canton friends in Peking—the merchant Yin-Pang, and Hooal, the literate. They of course were invited to attend the approaching ceremony, as well as several of the dignitaries and merchants with whom Kin-Fo was acquainted in the capital.

Wang's apathetic, indifferent pupil seemed at last to have become truly happy; two months' trouble and botheration seemed at last to have made him appreciate his fortunate lot; the philosopher had been right, and it was a matter for regret that he was not present to witness the truth of the theory that he had advanced.

All the time that was at his disposal was spent by Kin-Fo with the young widow. She was never so happy as when he was by her side. She cared little for the presents which he lavished upon her from the richest stores in the city. Her thoughts were of him and him alone, and over and over again she would repeat to herself the wise maxims of the famous Pan-Hoei-Pan :—

"If a woman has a husband after her own heart, she has him for all her life."

"A woman should have an unbounded respect for the man whose name she bears."

"A woman should be like a shadow and an echo in the house."

"The husband is the wife's heaven."

Meantime the preparations for the wedding, which Kin-Fo wished to be very handsome, were advancing rapidly. Already the thirty pairs of embroidered slippers that are necessary for a Chinese lady's trousseau had arrived at La-oo's house, and her boudoir was crammed with confectionery, dried fruits, burnt almonds, barley sugar, syrup of aloe, oranges, ginger, and shaddocks, all in confusion with rich silks, jewels of wrought gold and precious stones, rings, bracelets, cases for the nails, bodkins for the hair, and all the charming knick-knacks that Peking jewellers so cunningly devise.

In this strange country, a young girl when she marries never has a dowry. She is literally purchased either by the husband himself, or by his relations. Although she may have no brothers, she cannot inherit any portion of her paternal fortune, unless her father makes an express declaration in her favour. Such arrangements are always completed before the marriage, and are usually negotiated by agents called "Mei-jin."

The young *fiancée* is next presented to her husband's parents. The husband himself she never sees until the wedding-day, when she is carried in a closed chair to his house. The key of the chair is handed to the bridegroom, who opens the door, and if the lady within pleases his taste, he holds out his hand to her ; if not, he slams the door, and the engagement is all at an end, the girl's parents having the right to retain the purchase-money.

No preliminaries of this kind were necessary in Kin-Fo's case ; he and his future wife were both free agents, and had no one to consult besides themselves. There were, however, other formalities which might not be neglected.

For three days before the wedding the inside of La-oo's house was kept brilliantly lighted throughout, and for three whole nights Loo-ta-loo, as the representative of the bride's family, had to abstain from sleep, to indicate the grief felt at parting from the *fiancée*. Had Kin-Fo's parents been living, his house would have been illuminated too, as a sign of mourning, for according to the Hao-Khieou-Choon, "the marriage of a son ought to be regarded as an emblem of the death of the father."

There were moreover various astrological calculations not to be overlooked. The horoscopes were taken with due form, and foretold a perfect compatibility of temper between the affianced couple. The season of the year and the age of the moon were alike favourable, and it

seemed as though no marriage could possibly take place under more propitious auspices.

The appointed day arrived, and everything was ready for the great event. In China there is no formal contract made in the presence of a bonze or lama, nor even before a civil magistrate, and it was arranged that the bride should be conducted with great pomp to the hotel of Celestial Happiness at eight o'clock in the evening.

At seven o'clock Kin-Fo, attended by Craig and Fry, waited to receive his friends at the door of his apartment. The invitations dispensed to them had been inscribed in microscopic characters on red paper, and ran thus :—

“Kin-Fo of Shang-Hai presents his humble respects to —, and humbly begs him to assist at the humble ceremony of his marriage.”

The guests thus invited all arrived. They had come to do honour to the bridegroom, and to take part in the magnificent banquet prepared for the men, whilst the ladies would feast apart at a table specially reserved for them. Yin-Pang and Hooal the literate duly arrived amongst the rest. There were several mandarins who wore red balls as large as pigeon's eggs on the top of their official caps, indicating that they belonged to one of the three superior orders. Others wore only blue or white balls, marking them as of inferior ranks. The majority were civil officers of Chinese origin, as might be expected

of the friends of a man who was hostile to the Tartar race. All were gorgeously attired in brilliant robes, and formed a most striking assemblage.

As soon as they arrived, Kin-Fo conducted them to the reception-room, stopping twice on the way at doors which were opened by servants in gorgeous livery, and begging his guests to pass before him. His mode of addressing them was in the politest strain. He called them by their "noble names," inquired after their "noble health," and asked for information about their "noble families." Not even the most scrupulous observer of etiquette could have found the slightest flaw in his manners or deportment.

Craig and Fry watched his demeanour with surprise and admiration. They watched him also for another reason. The same idea had occurred to them both ; namely, that Wang might not have perished, as they imagined, in the river. Were there not yet several hours to expire? Perhaps, even now, he might mingle with the wedding-guests and strike the fatal blow. Improbable as this was, it was not impossible, and Craig and Fry carefully scrutinized every one who entered. But the face they sought did not appear.

Meantime the bride was leaving her house in the Chacoo Avenue, and was taking her place in a closed palanquin. Although Kin-Fo had not chosen to adopt

the mandarin costume, as according to ancient legislation he had the right of doing on the occasion of his marriage, La-oo's attire was in perfect conformity with the regulations of the highest society. Her robe was of crimson brocaded silk of the richest texture; over her face hung a transparent veil formed of the most minute pearls, which seemed to flow from the rich gold diadem that encircled her forehead; whilst her long black hair was adorned with jewels and artificial flowers most tastefully arranged. There was no fear that Kin-Fo would not find her charming enough for his taste when he should open the palanquin door.

The procession started. No doubt had the ceremony been that of a funeral, the spectacle would have been still more elaborate, but as it was, it was sufficiently imposing to attract the attention of the bystanders as it passed down the Grand Avenue on its way to the Tien-Men rampart. La-oo's friends and companions followed the palanquin, carrying with great ceremony the numerous articles of the trousseau. In front was a band of musicians playing on copper instruments and gongs, and close round the palanquin marched a troop of attendants bearing torches and lanterns of every hue. The bride was carefully concealed from all inquiring eyes; etiquette compelled that the first view should be reserved for her husband-elect.

Surrounded by a noisy concourse of the populace, the

cortège made its way shortly before eight o'clock to the hotel of Celestial Happiness. Kin-Fo was waiting at the decorated entrance, ready to open the door of the palanquin. He would then assist his bride to alight, and conduct her to a special apartment, where both together they would make their salutations to the four quarters of the heavens. Then they would proceed to the nuptial banquet, the bride first making four genuflexions before her husband, he in his turn making two to her. This done, they would spill two or three drops of wine as a libation, and would offer an oblation of food to the interceding spirits, and as a final consecration to their union, a goblet of wine would be handed to each ; they would severally drink half the contents, and pouring what remained into one cup, would proceed to empty it by drinking in turns.

The bride had arrived. Kin-Fo stepped forward. The master of the ceremonies handed him a key, with which he unlocked the door of the palanquin. He held out his hand ; La-oo, trembling and beautiful, descended lightly, and passed through the assembled visitors, who saluted her respectfully by raising their hands to their breasts. As the bride entered the hotel a signal was given, and instantly a number of illuminated kites in the form of dragons, phoenixes, and other emblems of marriage, rose into the air ; flying pigeons, with a little musical apparatus attached to their tails, filled the space overhead



A number of illuminated kites in the form of dragons, phoenixes, and other emblems of marriage, rose into the air.

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La-oo, trembling and beautiful, descended lightly.

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“An interdiction ! an interdiction !”

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with harmonious sounds, whilst hundreds of sky-rockets shot up and descended in a golden shower.

Suddenly a distant noise was heard upon the ramparts. Mingled with the murmur of voices were heard the tones of a trumpet's blast. The noise ceased, then began again. This time the sounds were nearer; it was evident they were approaching the very street where the bridal *cortège* had arrived. Kin-Fo paused and listened; his friends stood waiting to receive the bride. Gradually the commotion reached the street; the trumpets were being blown more vigorously than ever.

"What can it be?" Kin-Fo exclaimed.

La-oo turned pale; a presentiment of the cause of the uproar made her heart beat fast. All at once the mob rushed down the street. In the midst was a herald wearing the Imperial uniform, and escorted by a detachment of ti-paos. Silence fell upon the multitude, as he proclaimed in sonorous tones,—

"The Empress dowager is dead!"

"An interdiction! an interdiction!"

Kin-Fo uttered an exclamation of rage and disappointment. Only too well he knew what an interdiction meant. It meant that during the court-mourning, which commencing from that moment would last for a period to be fixed by law, no subject would be allowed to have his head shaved, no public festivities might be held, no

theatrical representations might be given, no courts of justice might be open, and worst of all—no marriages might be celebrated !”

La-oo, though downcast, was not disconcerted. Taking Kin-Fo's hand, she pressed it gently, and in a voice that strove to conceal her emotion, she said bravely,—

“ We must wait a little longer !”

And so the palanquin departed, bearing the fair young bride back to her home in the Cha-Cooa Avenue. The festivities were suspended; the tables cleared; the orchestra dismissed, and the guests, after hearty condolences with the disconsolate bridegroom, took their departure.

Kin-Fo, with only Craig and Fry, was left in the deserted apartment of the hotel of Celestial Happiness, a name of bitter sarcasm to him now. An evil fate seemed still to be pursuing him. He dared not run the risk of infringing the Imperial edict, and the interdiction might be prolonged at the Emperor's pleasure to an indefinite period. Here indeed was an occasion when he had need of all the precepts of philosophy instilled into him in his early days.

An hour later, a servant entered bearing a letter, which he said had just been delivered by a messenger. Kin-Fo exclaimed with surprise. He recognized the handwriting; it was Wang's own.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,—

“I am yet alive, but by the time you receive this I shall be dead. I die because I have not courage to perform my contract; but be content, I have provided for your wishes to be carried out. Lao-Shen, a Tai-ping, and a former comrade of my own, has your letter. He has hands and heart that will not flinch. He will do the deed. To him I have bequeathed the sum of money which would fall to me at your death.

“Farewell, dear friend; my death will not long precede your own! Again farewell!

“Yours ever,

“WANG.”

CHAPTER XVI.

OFF AGAIN.

HERE was a dilemma ! It left Kin-Fo in a more critical position than ever. Wang's courage, it was true, had failed him at the last, and nothing was to be apprehended from him. But had he not deputed his commission to an avowed Tai-ping who would murder him without the least scruple ? And was not that Tai-ping in possession of a document that would protect him from punishment ? Moreover, had he not 50,000 dollars to gain by the transaction ?

Kin-Fo stamped his foot in vexation, and muttered,—

“ Enough of this business ! it must be settled somehow ! ”

Handing Wang's letter to Craig and Fry, he asked them whether they had anything to suggest.

They inquired whether the paper he had given to Wang specified the 25th as being the limit provided for the execution of the contract.

“ No ; I left Wang to fill up the document with the

date at his discretion. This rascal Lao-Shen is free to act just when he pleases ; he has no stipulation about time to bind him."

"But the policy," said Craig and Fry, "expires on the 30th. He is sure to know enough to make him understand that he has nothing to gain if he delays the act an hour beyond that. No ; he will finish his business before that day, or he will leave it alone."

There was not much to be said in answer to this, but Kin-Fo paced up and down the room uneasily.

"We must find this Lao-Shen ; be he where he may, we must get at him. The letter I gave Wang must be redeemed ; at all hazards, at any cost, it must be redeemed : even if I pay the 50,000 dollars for it, I must have it."

"Of course, if you can," assented Craig.

"If I can ? I must, I will !" cried Kin-Fo, getting more and more excited ; "am I to suffer disappointment after disappointment ?"

And again he paced the room rapidly.

"I am off again !" he said, after a few minutes.

"At your service, sir," replied the men.

"I am off ! You, gentlemen, do as you please ; but I start at once."

"We attend you, of course," answered both Craig and Fry with one breath.

"As you like," Kin-Fo repeated.

"We should be failing entirely in our duty to our employers if we were to permit you to travel alone."

"Well, then," said Kin-Fo, "no time to lose."

It was not very likely that it would prove at all a difficult matter to discover Lao-Shen. He was a notorious character, and very few inquiries were enough to elicit the information that after the suppression of the rebellion in which he had taken an active part, he had retired beyond the Great Wall to the north, into the district around the gulf of Leao-Tong, an inlet of the gulf of Pe-Chi-Li. The government had not made terms with him in the same way as it had with many others of the insurgent leaders, but had winked at his retreating beyond the Imperial frontier, when he found himself at liberty to adopt the congenial profession of a highwayman. Altogether, he was a man whose qualifications for the office for which Wang had engaged him could not be disputed.

A little closer investigation soon brought it further to light that Lao-Shen had quite recently been seen in the neighbourhood of Foo-Ning, a small port on the Gulf of Leao-Tong, and thither Kin-Fo made up his mind to hasten without delay. At least he would be on the track of the man he sought.

First of all, however, he must go to La-oo and inform her of his decision. Her grief was pitiable. With tears streaming from her eyes, she besought him to keep far as

possible out of the reach of a man hired to be his assassin. Let him leave China altogether. Madness to go near Lao-Shen ; better go to the remotest corner of the earth.

As well as he could, Kin-Fo consoled her ; he explained that there was no quarter of the world where he could endure to feel that his life was at the disposal of a mercenary rascal ; it was his determination to follow the fellow up, and to find him out ; he was going to put a stop to the bargain ; he was going to get back that unlucky paper, and he should succeed ; he would soon be back again in Peking ; he would be back before the day appointed for the Court mourning came to an end. And he finished by exclaiming,—

“How fortunate for us that our marriage has been delayed this little while ! How dreadful for you, while my life hangs thus in the balance, to be my wife !”

“No, no, indeed,” answered La-oo sadly ; “if only I had been your wife, I could have claimed the right of going where you go, and being with you in every hour of danger.”

“Far better otherwise,” said Kin-Fo ; “I had rather face a thousand perils, and die a thousand deaths, than bring you into jeopardy.”

La-oo wept still more bitterly. A tear rose to the eye of Kin-Fo himself, and saying “farewell,” he tore himself from her embrace.

The same morning saw the party back again at Tong-Choo. Soon repined very sorrowfully at being again disturbed in the rest he was ever seeking ; he thought himself the unluckiest of mortals. But there was no help for it.

What now should be the line of action ? This was the next question to be decided. There was the choice of going by land or by water. To go by land would take them through a country which under the circumstances was especially perilous, although had they been going no farther than the Great Wall, they would have been tempted to run the risk. But the port of Foo-Ning, whither they were on their way, was far to the east, and if only a vessel could be found to convey them, they would really save time by going by sea. The passage ought only to take a few days. Kin-Fo set about inquiring, and had the satisfaction of learning that a ship on its way to Foo-Ning was at that very time lying at the mouth of the Pei-Ho, and which, if he took one of the fast river-boats down the stream, there was no doubt he would be able to catch. He would be sure to find accommodation for his party on board.

Craig and Fry begged for an hour's grace ; they obtained the permission, which was granted with some reluctance, and made use of the time in purchasing a great variety of apparatus for saving life in case of shipwreck ; they bought old-fashioned life-belts, and unwilling to let their charge incur the slightest risk that precaution could anticipate,

they bought the recently-invented floating-costume of Captain Boyton.

Every preparation was hurried on, and it was still quite early in the afternoon of the 26th, when they all went on board the "Pei-tang," one of the little river steamers that ply along the Pei-Ho. The river winds so much that the distance between Tong-Choo and the river-mouth is as nearly as possible double the length of a straight line drawn from point to point; its banks are artificial and the channel is consequently deep enough to accommodate vessels of considerable burden, so that the traffic is more important than that of the other line, which lies at a little distance almost parallel.

The swift little craft glided between the buoys that marked out the channel, beating up the yellow waters with her paddles, and filling the irrigation-canals with a gentle swell. The lofty pagoda on the outskirts of the town was soon passed, and owing to a sharp curve in the stream soon out of sight. Although subject to tide, the river had no great width; along its shores sandy downs alternated with woody thickets; the villages of Matao, He-Si-Vo, Nan-Tsai, and Yang-Tsoon had grown up upon its banks, between which pleasant hamlets nestled in prolific orchards.

Ere long Tien-Tsin came in sight. Some delay occurred in consequence of the east bridge having to be opened for

their passage, and because it was a matter of some difficulty for the steamer to thread her way through the crowd of ships that filled the harbour. The captain seemed not to have the slightest compunction in cutting deliberately through the moorings of some of the small craft that were lying at anchor, and letting them go adrift ; contributing to aggravate the confusion which, had there been a harbour-master in the place, must have fairly driven him out of his senses.

Craig and his colleague made a point throughout the passage of never stirring an inch from the place of duty. They felt a heavier responsibility now brought upon them by the change of circumstances. It was no longer from Wang, whom they knew well enough to recognize at a glance, that they had to defend their charge ; it was from Lao-Shen, a desperate Tai-ping, a man they had never seen, who might be in disguise among the passengers, ready at any moment to perpetrate his murderous act. Could they be too vigilant ? They scarcely allowed themselves time to eat ; when should they be able to find time to sleep ?

Soon was all in a flutter, but his disquietude arose from altogether a different cause ; the prospect of a sea-voyage thoroughly upset him, and, although the water in the river was perfectly smooth, the nearer the steamboat approached the gulf, the more livid did his countenance become.



Along the shore might be seen numbers of men fishing with cormorants.

"Then you have never been on the sea?" said Craig to him.

"Never," he replied.

"You don't seem to think you will like it," added Fry.

"I don't like it at all."

"You must keep your head up," said Craig.

"And your mouth shut," continued Fry.

The poor fellow looked as if he had not the least objection to keep his mouth shut, but he cast one of those lugubrious glances at the widening waters which often betray beforehand the dread of sea-sickness. He made no reply, but found a place as near the middle of the boat as he could.

By this time the character of the river-scenery had somewhat changed. The right-hand bank was considerably higher than the left, which was low and beaten by a light surf. Beyond it lay extensive fields of sorghum, maize, wheat, and millet, bearing witness to the travellers that China, with her millions to feed, cannot afford to leave an acre of her soil untilled. The land everywhere was intersected by canals for irrigation, and machines made of bamboos, resembling norias, were erected to pump up the water, and diffuse it in all directions. Here and there, close to yellow-clay cottages, were some orchards that could boast of apples which would be no disgrace to the plains of Normandy. Along the shore, too, might be seen

numbers of men fishing with cormorants, the birds plunging into the water at a sign from their owner, and reappearing with a fish, which a ring round the neck prevented them from swallowing. Ducks, crows, magpies, and sparrow-hawks, startled by the snorting of the steam-boats, rose very frequently from the lanky grass.

But, although the shores were singularly quiet, the traffic on the river was enormous. Vessels of all kinds were ever running up and down the channel. There were war-junks, with their batteries covered by a concave roof, some worked by a double row of oars, and some by paddle-wheels moved by hand; there were excise-junks, with two masts, decorated at the prow and stern respectively with the heads and tails of fantastic animals; merchant-junks of large tonnage, which, laden with the richest products of the country, brave the typhoons of the neighbouring seas; passenger-junks, rowed or towed according to the tide, used by such as needed not to hurry; and pleasure-junks, used as yachts by mandarins, with little boats in tow.

Besides these, there were sampans of every kind, with sails of plaited rushes, literally, as their name signifies, composed of "three planks," the smallest of them being worked by women, who often had infants on their backs; occasionally, too, there were the huge wood-rafts, the produce of the wood-cutters of Manchuria, veritable floating

villages, with huts erected and gardens laid out upon their upper surface.

The villages on the banks were not numerous; there could hardly be twenty altogether between Tien-Tsin and Takoo, at the mouth of the river. Occasionally, the smoke issuing from great brick-kilns would mingle with the vapour from the Pei-tang, and for a few moments obscure the atmosphere, and towards evening some tall white masses, arranged very symmetrically, loomed through the twilight, which proved to be salt from the neighbouring mines.

In this arid and melancholy district, described by M. de Beauvoir as "all sand and salt, dust and ashes," lies the estuary of the Pei-Ho.

Before sunrise the little steamer had reached Takoo. Here were the ruins of the northern and southern forts that were taken in 1860 by the allied army of England and France, when General Collineau on the 24th of August made his grand attack, the gun-boats forcing the entrance of the river. A narrow strip, now scarcely occupied at all, was conceded to the French, and there may still be seen the monument erected over the bodies of the officers and men who fell upon that occasion.

Unable to cross the bar of the river, the Pei-tang had to land her passengers at Ta-koo. It was a town of considerable importance, and would be found capable of a

large development, if only the mandarins would permit a railway to be laid down.

The ship bound for Foo-Ning was to sail that day, so that no time would be lost. The vessel was named the "Sam-Yep ;" and Kin-Fo, finding nothing to detain him on shore, hailed a sampan, and went on board at once.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON BOARD THE "SAM-YEP."

A WEEK previously an American ship, chartered by one of the Chino-Californian companies, had cast anchor in the harbour of Takoo. She was freighted at the expense of the Ting-Tong agency that had its head-quarters at the Laurel Hill Cemetery, San Francisco, where the bodies of the celestials who had died in the United States awaited their transit to their native land, where their religion ordains that they shall be interred. The vessel, which was bound for Canton, conveyed as many as 250 coffins, seventy-five of which had been disembarked at Takoo, and transferred that morning to the vessel on which Kin-Fo and his party had taken passage, to be despatched to the northern provinces. The voyage, it is true, at that season of the year, would not last more than two or three days, and no other vessel was at present going in the direction of Leao-Tong; otherwise it was not exactly the one they would have been disposed to select.

The "Sam-Yep" was a sea-junk of about 300 tons burden. Some junks of over 1000 tons draw only six feet of water, enabling them to cross the bars of rivers. Too wide for their length, their beam measuring a quarter of their keel, they sail badly unless close to the wind, but have the advantage of being able to put about, as it were on their own pivot, as easily as a top. Their enormous helms are pierced with holes, a system very much applauded in China, but the effect of which is open to controversy. Be that as it may, however, these ponderous junks no doubt do brave the sea around the mouths of rivers, and it has been recorded that one of them, chartered by a Canton firm and commanded by an American, conveyed a cargo of tea and porcelain to San Francisco, an instance which proves that it is not impossible for them to stand the open sea. It has also been asserted by competent judges that the Chinese make excellent seamen.

The "Sam-Yep" was of modern construction, her hull being somewhat after the European model. She was built entirely of bamboo sewn together and caulked with tow and resin from Cambodga, and was so water-tight that it was considered unnecessary for her to carry a pump in her hold. She floated as light as a cork; her anchor was made of wood of a most durable character; her rigging was of palm-fibre, and remarkably flexible; and she had two masts, a mainmast and foremast, like a

lugger. In every respect, she seemed perfectly fitted for short cruises.

In looking at her, no one would have imagined that she had temporarily been converted into an enormous hearse, and that so melancholy a cargo had replaced the ordinary chests of tea, bales of silks, and packets of Chinese perfumery. She had laid aside none of her usual decorations; fore and aft waved pennants and streamers; on the prow was painted a great red eye, like that of some huge sea-monster; from the mast-head floated the Chinese flag; and two pieces of ordnance glittered brightly in the sunlight. The whole appearance of the vessel was fresh and festive. After all, was she not performing the pleasant duty of restoring to their native land the corpses of those who had expressed their wish to lie there? To Kin-Fo and Soon there was nothing repugnant in the idea of such a cargo. The two Americans doubtless would have preferred something different, but they had no alternative than to perform their office of following Kin-Fo.

A captain and a crew of six men were all that were required to work the junk. It has been said that the mariner's compass was invented in China; whether that is true or not, the Chinese cruisers never use it; and Captain Yin, the commander of the "Sam-Yep," as he did not expect to go out of sight of land, was no exception to the general rule.

Captain Yin was a bright, loquacious little man, nearly always smiling, and a living illustration of the theory of perpetual motion. He was never still: eyes, arms, and hands seemed here, there, and everywhere, and moved as fast as his tongue. He rated and scolded his crew, but on the whole he was a capital seaman, had his vessel perfectly under his control, and was well acquainted with the coasts. The handsome sum that Kin-Fo had paid as passage-money had by no means a tendency to lower his spirits; a hundred and fifty taels¹ for a trip of sixty hours was a windfall that did not often fall to his lot.

Kin-Fo and his guardians found quarters, such as they were, in the stern of the vessel. Soon was accommodated near the bow.

After a most careful scrutiny of both captain and crew, Craig and Fry came to the conclusion that there was nothing at all suspicious in the appearance of any of them. It was quite unlikely that they were in collusion with Lao-Shen, as it was the merest chance that had brought Kin-Fo upon the junk at all. Beyond the ordinary perils of a sea voyage, there was no special danger pending over their charge, and they felt justified in relaxing a little of their vigilance.

Kin-Fo felt the relief of being left more to himself. He retired to his cabin, and began to "philosophize," as he expressed it. Here was he, a man who when he was

¹ About 50*l*.

exempt from care amid the luxuries of his yamen, never knew what happiness was. Trouble and anxiety had wrought a transformation in his mind, and now, when once he should gain possession of the fatal letter, he thought he should know true happiness at last. That the letter would be restored to him he had no doubt whatever. It was only a question of money with Lao-Shen; he would as soon receive 50,000 dollars from Kin-Fo during his lifetime as after his death; perhaps sooner, as it would save him the trouble of going to Shang-Hai and presenting himself at the Centenarian Office, a proceeding which, however great might be the clemency of the Government, could not be without a certain amount of risk to a former rebel. The difficulty was lest the Taiping should attack him unawares. He knew nothing of Lao-Shen's movements, whilst Lao-Shen might be perfectly conversant with his, and the danger would become even more imminent when he landed in the very province where he resided. Nevertheless, Kin-Fo was hopeful, and went on to make brilliant plans for the future, in which of course the young widow at Peking played no unimportant part.

Soon's meditations, meantime, were of a very different nature. Lying prostrate in his cabin, he was paying his tribute to the malevolent deities of the Gulf of Pe-Chi-Li. He could scarcely collect his thoughts sufficiently to curse his master, or Wang, or the robber Lao-Shen. Ai ai ya!

His heart was stupid, his brain was stupid, his ideas were stupid ! He could think no more about his tea nor his rice. Ai ai ya ! what a fool he had been to enter the service of a man who wanted to come to sea ! He would give up his pigtail, he would shave his head, he would become a bonze, if only he could get back to dry land. A yellow dog—yes, a yellow dog—was devouring his liver and his stomach. Ai ai ya !

With a good south breeze, the "Sam-Yep" ran by the three or four miles of sandy shore that here lay from east to west. She passed Peh-Tang, at the mouth of the river of the same name, not far from the spot where the European army landed ; and in due course, Shan-Tung, Tchiang-Ho at the mouth of the Tau, and Hai-Ve-Tse. This part of the gulf was almost deserted ; important shipping traffic did not extend beyond a radius of twenty miles from the estuary of the Pei-Ho, and a few merchant junks on short cruises, and about a dozen fishing-boats were all that could be seen near the shore, whilst out to sea the line of the horizon was quite unbroken.

Observing that all the fishing-boats, even those of only five or six tons' burden, carried one or two small cannon, Craig and Fry asked Captain Yin the reason, and were told that it was for protection against pirates.

" Pirates ! " exclaimed Craig. " Surely there are no pirates in the Gulf of Pe-Chi-Li ? "



“ Are the guns loaded ? ”

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"Why not in the Gulf of Pe-Chi-Li as much as in all the seas of China?" rejoined the captain.

And he gave a merry laugh that displayed his two rows of fine white teeth.

"You don't seem to be much afraid of them," said Fry.

"Haven't I two guns to keep them at a distance?" said Yin.

"Are the guns loaded?" Craig inquired.

"Generally; not now."

"Why not now?" asked Fry.

"Because I have no powder on board," calmly responded the captain.

"Then what good will your guns do you?" the Americans exclaimed simultaneously.

The captain laughed again.

"If my junk were loaded to the hatchways with opium or tea," he said, "then it would be worth defending; but with its present cargo—"

He shrugged his shoulders with an expressive gesture.

"You gentlemen seem to have rather a dread of pirates," he said presently, "and yet you have no property of any value on board."

Craig and Fry informed him that they had special reasons for wishing to avoid an attack, and asked how the pirates could be aware beforehand of the nature of his

freight. Captain Yin pointed to a white flag that was fluttering half-mast high above their heads.

"Pirates know what that means," he said ; "they will not take the trouble to rob a vessel laden with coffins."

"But perhaps," insisted Craig, "they may think the white flag is only a *ruse*, and will come on board to see for themselves."

"Let them come, then," said Yin jauntily ; "they will soon have to go back the same way as they came."

Craig and Fry said no more, but they could not altogether share the captain's equanimity. A junk of three hundred tons burden, even though carrying nothing but ballast, would be no mean prize for freebooters. They could, however, do no more than quietly await the chapter of accidents, and hope for the best.

The captain, for his part, had neglected nothing that could insure a favourable voyage. Before setting sail he had sacrificed a cock to the presiding deities of the sea, and its feathers were still suspended from the foremast ; a few drops of its blood had been sprinkled on the deck, and a small cup of wine thrown overboard had completed the propitiatory offering.

But whether it was that the cock had not been sufficiently plump, or the wine had not been of the choicest vintage, somehow or other the capricious deities seemed not to have been satisfied. In the course of the day, quite

unexpectedly, for the weather was bright and clear, the junk was overtaken by a tremendous gale, an event which the keenest of mariners could not have foreseen.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening, and the "Sam-Yep" was preparing to double the promontory beyond which the coast-line extended in a north-easterly direction ; that done, she might run straight before the wind, and Captain Yin had every reason to think that in less than twenty-four hours she would be at Foo-Ning.

As the time for arriving drew near, Kin-Fo's impatience to gain possession of the letter increased considerably. With Soon the yearning to get on shore amounted almost to frenzy. Craig and Fry remembered that in three days more their responsibilities concerning the client of the Centenarian would be at an end ; at midnight on the 30th of June his policy would expire, the premium had not been renewed, and all anxiety would cease.

Just as the "Sam-Yep" reached the entrance of the Gulf of Leao-Tong the wind veered suddenly to the north-east ; it subsequently changed to the north, and two hours later was blowing from the north-west. If Captain Yin had had a barometer on board, he would have noticed that the mercury had made a sudden fall, a rapid rarefaction of the air that betokened an approaching typhoon,¹ the motion of

¹ Revolving storms are called tornadoes on the east coast of Africa, and typhoons in Chinese waters. Their scientific name is cyclone.

which was lightening the atmospheric strata. Had he been acquainted with the observations of Paddington and Maury, forewarned, he would have endeavoured to alter his tack and steer to the north-east, in the hope of getting beyond the attraction of the tempest.

But he did not understand the use of the barometer, and was ignorant of the law of cyclones. He had sacrificed a cock, and therefore was he not insured against every calamity? Nevertheless, superstitious Chinaman though he was, he proved an excellent seaman on the occasion, and his instinct seemed to serve him as well as the science of a European captain.

The typhoon was not of a large extent, consequently its velocity was very great, the rotatory motion being little less than sixty miles an hour. Fortunately it carried the "Sam-Yep" to the east, otherwise she would have been driven on to a coast where she must inevitably have perished.

At eleven o'clock the tempest reached its height. Captain Yin was not laughing now, but he had lost none of his presence of mind. With his hand constantly on the helm, he skilfully steered the light vessel, which rose easily upon the waves, and in all his orders he was ably seconded by his crew.

Kin-Fo had left his cabin, and, clinging to the bulwarks, was contemplating the sea and sky. The clouds, torn to



Captain Yin was not laughing now.

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shreds by the hurricane, were hurrying in masses over the surface of the water, whilst the waves, all white in the blackness of the night, seemed to be sucked up by the typhoon far above their ordinary level. He was neither surprised nor alarmed. This storm was only one of the series of misfortunes that his ill-luck had prepared for him. In this summer season other people might have made a short passage of sixty hours under favourable circumstances ; but such luck was not to be his.

Craig and Fry were much more uneasy, not for themselves, but for the interests of the Centenarian. Only let their lives be preserved until midnight on the 30th of June, and the conscientious agents cared not what became of themselves or their charge afterwards.

As for Soon, to his mind the junk was in no greater danger now than she had been ever since he came on board. Stormy or calm, it was all alike to him. Ai ai ya ! The passengers down in the hold had the best of it ; they felt neither rolling nor pitching ; he wished he were among them. Ai ai ya !

For the space of three hours the junk really was in a critical position. A false turn of the helm, and she would have been lost, for the sea would have dashed over her deck ; and, although, like a pail, she could not capsize, there was every chance that she might fill and founder. Tossed as she was by the waves, it was impossible to keep

her in any constant direction, nor could any estimate be made as to the course she was taking.

By some happy chance, however, she ultimately gained without serious damage the centre of the great atmospheric disturbance that extended over an area of sixty miles. Here, like a placid lake in the midst of an angry ocean, was a tract of smooth water, two or three miles in area, where the wind was scarcely perceptible.

The junk, which had been driven thither under bare poles, was now in safety. Towards three o'clock in the morning the fury of the cyclone ceased almost as if by magic, and the angry waters round the little lake subsided into calmness. But when daylight dawned, no land was in sight. The "Sam-Yep" was the centre of a barren waste of sea and sky.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CARGO.

"WHERE are we, Captain Yin?" Kin-Fo asked after the danger was all over.

"I hardly know," replied the captain, who had quite recovered his jovial looks.

"Are we in the Gulf of Pe-Chi-Li?"

"Not unlikely."

"Or do you think we have been driven into the Gulf of Leao-Tong?"

"Very probably."

"Where, then, are we going to land?"

"Just where the wind takes us."

"When?"

"That's more than I can tell you."

Kin-Fo was beginning to lose his temper.

"A true Chinaman always knows his whereabouts," he said, quoting a Chinese proverb.

"Ah! that means on land, not at sea!" answered the captain, grinning from ear to ear.

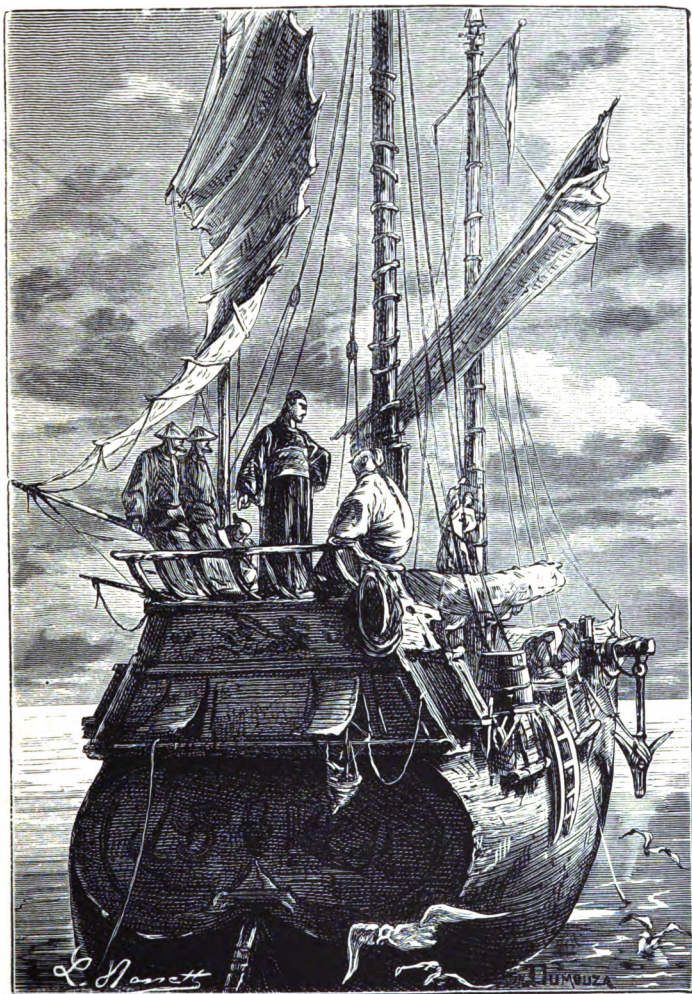
"I don't see anything to laugh at," said Kin-Fo impatiently.

"Nor do I see anything to cry at," retorted Yin.

It might be true that there was nothing really alarming in the situation, but it was quite obvious that the captain did not know where he was ; without a compass he had no means of judging in what direction his ship had been driven by the tempest, during which the wind had been blowing from such different quarters, and while, with her sails furled and her helm useless, she had been the mere plaything of the hurricane.

But whether the junk had been carried into one gulf or the other, there could be no hesitation now about the necessity of putting her head to the west ; ultimately, land must be sighted in that direction. Had it been in his power, the captain would forthwith have hoisted sail and followed the sun, which was once more shining, though only faintly ; but there was not a breath of wind ; the typhoon had been succeeded by a dead calm ; not a ripple played upon the smooth undulations that just lifted up the vessel and allowed her to sink again without moving her a foot forward. A heavy vapour hung over the sea, and the general aspect was in striking contrast to the commotion of the previous night. It was one of those calms locally known as "white calms."

"And how long is this going to last ?" said Kin-Fo.



“ And how long is this going to last ? ”

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"No telling," replied the captain with perfect composure ; "at this season of the year calms sometimes continue for weeks."

"Weeks!" repeated Kin-Fo ; "do you suppose I am to stay here for weeks ?"

"No help for it, my dear sir, unless by good luck we can manage to get taken in tow."

"Confound the junk ! what a fool I was to be caught coming on board !"

"Will you allow me to offer you two little bits of advice ? Be like other folks, and don't grumble at the weather which you can't alter ; and, secondly, do as I am going to do ; go to bed and get some comfortable sleep."

And with a philosophy that was worthy of Wang himself, the captain retired to his cabin, leaving only a few men on deck.

For the next quarter of an hour Kin-Fo paced backwards and forwards, drumming his fingers upon his folded arms ; then, casting a glance at the desolate scene around, he made up his mind to go to his cabin, and left the deck without saying a word to Craig and Fry, who had been lounging meanwhile against the taffrail, not speaking a word to each other, but no doubt holding mutual intercourse by silent sympathy. They had heard all that passed between Kin-Fo and the captain, but to say the truth, they really were not concerned at the delay which was giving so much

annoyance to the young man ; if they were losing anything in time, they were gaining in security, for as long as Kin-Fo was on board the "Sam-Yep," was he not free from any chance of being attacked by Lao-Shen ? moreover, the period of their engagement and consequently of their responsibility was close at hand ; two days more and a whole band of Tai-pings might assail him, and it would not be their duty to risk a hair of their heads to protect him. Practical Yankees as they were, they were devoted to the client of the Centenarian so long as he represented the sum of 200,000 dollars ; they would be utterly indifferent when that interest lapsed.

Under these circumstances there was nothing to prevent them from sitting down to their luncheon with a capital appetite. The food was excellent ; they partook of the same dishes, consumed the same quantities of bread and the same number of slices of meat ; they drank Biddulph's health in the same number of glasses of wine, and afterwards smoked precisely the same number of cigarettes. If not by birth, they were Siamese twins in taste and habit.

The day passed on without incident or accident ; there was still the "woolly" sky ; still the smooth sea ; and nothing to disturb the general monotony.

Towards four o'clock in the afternoon, poor Soon made his appearance on deck. He reeled, he staggered as if he

were drunk, though probably he had never in all his life been so abstemious before.

His complexion was blue and green, verging to yellow; probably when he got on shore again it would be as usual, orange; when he was angry he would flush into crimson, and thus in a very short period his countenance would have exhibited all the colours of the rainbow.

Keeping his eyes half-closed, and not daring to look beyond the bulwarks, he stumbled up to Craig and Fry, and said,—

“Are we nearly there?”

“No,” they answered.

“Not nearly?”

“No.”

“Ai ai ya!” he moaned, and flung himself down at the foot of the mast, wriggling as if in convulsions, which made his miserable little *queue* shake like a puppy’s tail.

Earlier in the day Captain Yin had given orders, very prudently, for the hatchways to be opened that the sun might dry up the water that during the typhoon had been shipped into the hold. Craig and Fry had been promenading the deck, repeatedly pausing and looking down through the middle hatchway, until at last, prompted by curiosity, they agreed to go below.

Except just where the light was admitted from above, the hold was very dark; but after a short time the eye

grew accustomed to the obscurity, and it was quite possible to distinguish the way in which the singular cargo had been stowed.

The hold was not divided, as in most junks, into partitions, but was open from end to end, and the whole of it appropriated to this strange consignment, the crew having to find their berths forward. Piled up one upon another, and arrayed on both sides, were the seventy-five coffins bound for Foo-Ning, all fastened quite securely so as to prevent any oscillation that might imperil the ship, a passage being left along the middle, the end of which, remote from the hatchway, was sunk in gloom.

Craig and Fry walked silently and softly, as though they were treading the floor of a mausoleum. There was something of awe mingling with their curiosity. The coffins were of all sizes, a small proportion of them being costly and elaborate, the generality perfectly plain. Of the emigrants whom necessity drives across the Pacific, it is very few that make a fortune or realize a competency in the diggings of California, or in the mines of Nevada and Colorado ; nearly all die as impoverished as they went out ; but all, whatever their wealth or poverty, are without exception and with equal care brought back to their native land.

About ten of the coffins were made of valuable wood adorned with all the richness that Chinese fancy could

devise ; but the rest were merely four planks with ends, put together in the roughest manner and painted yellow ; every one of them bore the name and address of its tenant, and as Craig and Fry passed along they kept on reading such names as Lien-Foo of Yun-Ping-Fu, Nan-Loon of Foo-Ning, Shen-Kin of Kin-Kia, Loo-ang of Ku-Li-Koa, and remarked that there seemed no confusion ; every corpse could be conveyed to its destination to await in field, in orchard, or in plain, its ultimate interment in Chinese soil.

“ Well packed ! ” whispered Craig.

“ Well packed ! ” whispered Fry.

They spoke calmly as they would about a consignment of ordinary goods from San Francisco or New York.

Having proceeded to the farther end of the passage where it was most gloomy, they turned and looked along the avenue of that temporary cemetery towards the light ; they were on the point of returning, when a slight sound attracted their attention.

“ A rat ! ” they said.

“ I should think a rat would prefer a cargo of rice,” said Craig.

“ Or of maize,” added Fry.

The noise continued. It was like a scratching with nails or claws. It was on the starboard side, and came from about the level of their heads ; consequently from the upper tier of coffins.

The men hissed as they would to scare away a rat.

Still the scratching went on.

They listened with bated breath.

Evidently the sound came from inside one of the coffins.

"Some Chinaman buried before he was dead," said Craig.

"And just come to life again," continued Fry.

They went close up to the coffin, and laid their hands upon it; it did not admit of a doubt that there was movement within.

"This means mischief!" they muttered.

The same idea had simultaneously occurred to them both, that a new danger was threatening the client in their charge.

Raising their hands, they could feel that the lid of the coffin was being gently lifted up. With the most perfect composure they waited to see what would follow next. They did not make a movement. It was too dark for them to distinguish anything plainly, but they were not mistaken in thinking they saw a coffin lid slowly opening on the larboard side.

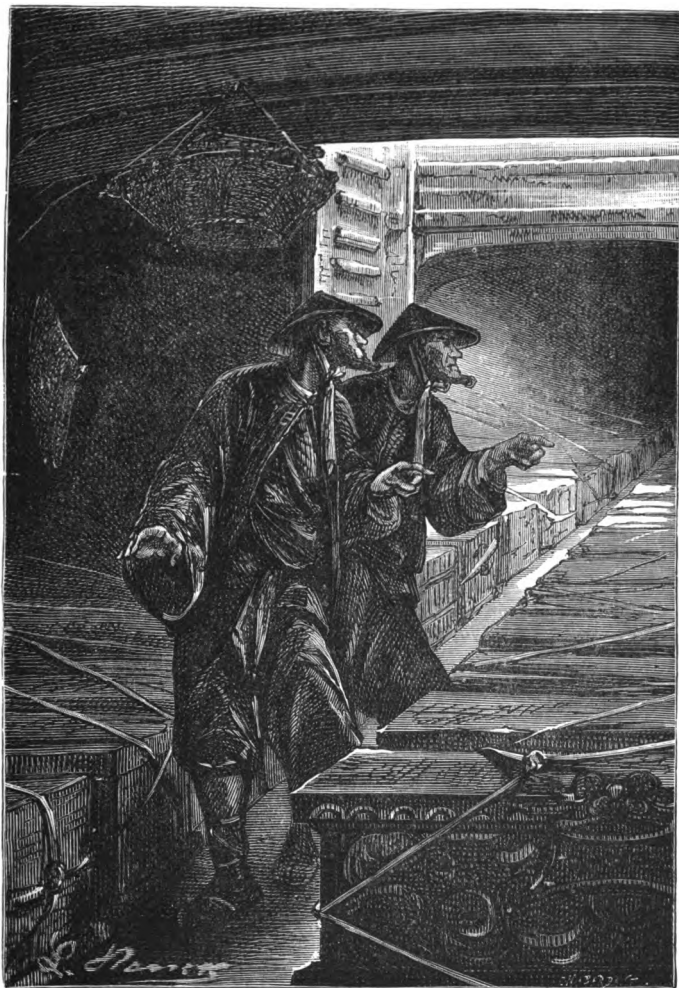
A whisper was next heard.

A whisper followed in reply.

"Is that you, Cono?"

"Is that you, Fa-Kien?"

"Is it to be to-night?"



They listened with bated breath.

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"Yes, to-night."

"Before the moon rises?"

"Yes, in the second watch."

"Do the others know?"

"They have all been told."

"I shall be glad to get out of this."

"Ay, so shall we all."

"Thirty-six hours in a coffin is no joke!"

"You are right."

"But Lao-Shen ordered it."

"Hush, hush! what's that?"

The last exclamation was caused by Craig and Fry making an involuntary movement at the mention of Lao-Shen's name; but they did not speak nor move again.

There was a slight pause, after which the coffin-lids gently closed themselves again, and there was complete silence.

Stealthily on hands and knees, Craig and Fry made their way back through the hatchway on to the deck, and in a moment were locked in their own cabin, where they could converse without risk of being overheard.

"Dead men who talk—" began Craig.

"Are not dead yet," concluded Fry.

The mere mentioning of Lao-Shen's name under these somewhat ghastly circumstances had been enough to

reveal the whole truth. It was evident that the Tai-ping had employed some agents who had found their way on board, and it did not admit of much doubt that they had only succeeded by the connivance of the captain. The coffins had been disembarked from the American ships, and had had to remain for a day or two to await the arrival of the "Sam-Yep," and during that time a number of them had been broken open, the corpses removed, and their places supplied by the confederates of Lao-Shen. How it had transpired that Kin-Fo was among the passengers of the "Sam-Yep" was a mystery they could not explain; but they recollected that they had noticed suspicious characters on board from the time of embarkation, and acknowledged that it would be a thing discreditable to themselves if, after all, the office they represented should lose the two hundred thousand dollars at stake.

They were not the men to lose their presence of mind; they were facing a grave and unexpected emergency; there was not much time in which to form their plans; the deed was to be done before the second watch; there was not much scope for deliberation; there was only one conclusion to be arrived at—before the second watch Kin-Fo must be away from the junk.

How the escape was to be made was a question more easy to ask than to answer. The only boat belonging to the ship was a cumbrous craft that it would take the

whole crew to lower to the water, and if the captain were an accomplice in the plot, the crew could not be enlisted to lend a helping hand. The project of using the boat had to be abandoned.

Seven o'clock, and the captain was still in his cabin. Was it not likely he was only waiting in solitude until the appointed time had passed, and the deed was done. The junk was floating adrift; there was no watch, why should there be? A sailor, all alone, was slumbering in the bows. If only the appliances were at hand, the opportunity for escape was complete. Had they been anxious to get away from a fire-ship, they scarcely could have been more excited. A thought struck them; there was not a moment to spare to discuss it; it must be put into execution now, at once.

Opening the door of Kin-Fo's cabin, they touched him gently; he was fast asleep; they touched him again.

"What do you want with me?" he said.

They told him as concisely as they could all the facts; he did not seem at all alarmed; he pondered a moment, and asked,—

"Why not throw the rascals overboard?"

"That is quite out of the question," they replied.

"Then are we to do nothing?" said Kin-Fo.

"Do as we tell you," answered Craig; "we have made our plans."

"Let me hear," said Kin-Fo, in some surprise.

"Take this dress ; ask no questions ; put it on, and be ready !"

The men opened a parcel they had brought with them. It contained four sets of the swimming apparatus just invented by Captain Boyton. They gave a set to Kin-Fo, saying,—

"We have more for ourselves, and one for Soon."

"Go and fetch Soon," he bade them.

And Soon was brought in, looking as if he were suffering from an attack of paralysis.

"You are to put this on," said his master.

But Soon was incapable of helping himself, and while he kept on moaning, "Ai ai ya," the others contrived to drag him into the waterproof attire.

Eight o'clock, and they were all equipped ; they looked like four great seals just going to plunge into the frozen waters, although it must be owned that Soon was almost too flabby in his condition to be compared to so lithe a creature.

The junk continued to float in absolute stillness upon the unruffled sea ; Craig and Fry opened one of the port-holes of the cabin, and quietly dropped Soon down without more ado. Kin-Fo cautiously followed ; Craig and Fry only stayed to make sure that they had provided them-



Craig and Fry opened one of the port-holes of the cabin, and quietly dropped
Soon down without more ado.

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selves with all the necessary appurtenances, and plunged in after them.

So quiet were all their movements that no one on board was aware that four of the passengers had quitted the "Sam-Yep."

CHAPTER XX.

A TIGER-SHARK.

IN the course of three hours day began to break, and before it was quite light the junk was out of sight. Though sailing in the same direction, the "scaphandres" had of course been unable to keep pace with her, and she was already nine or ten miles away.

All danger from that quarter was therefore at an end; nevertheless the situation was not altogether satisfactory. Far as the eye could reach there was no indication of land, nor was there a single vessel of any kind in sight; whether they were in the Gulf of Pe-Chi-Li or in the Yellow Sea was still uncertain.

The direction taken by the junk, however, demonstrated that sooner or later land would be found towards the west, and, as a slight breeze still ruffled the waters, it was advisable to continue sailing that way.

It was now necessary to satisfy the cravings of hunger, which, after a ten hours' fast, were very keen.

Several gutta-percha tubes are attached to the jacket to admit the air, which can be regulated to any density, so that a traveller may float upright with the water up to his neck or only to his waist, or may lie horizontally upon its surface, all the time in perfect safety and with complete liberty of action.

The practical utility of the apparatus has already been proved in a way that does much credit to its inventor. To make it complete there are several other appurtenances: a waterproof bag that is slung over the shoulder, and contains various useful articles; a small pole which can be attached to the foot by a socket, and carries a small sail; and a light paddle, which may be used either as an oar or a rudder, as circumstances may require.

Thus equipped, Kin-Fo, Craig, Fry, and Soon floated off, and a very few strokes of their paddles carried them a considerable distance from the junk. The night was very dark, and even if Captain Yin or any of his men had been on deck, they would not have perceived the fugitives, and no one could have the slightest suspicion that they were escaping.

The second watch, the time mentioned by the pretended corpse, would be about the middle of the night, consequently Kin-Fo and his companions had several hours' grace during which they hoped to get a good mile to leeward of the "Sam-Yep." A very slight breeze was

beginning to ruffle the surface of the water, but not enough to make them depend on any other means except their paddles for their progress.

In a very few minutes Kin-Fo, Craig, and Fry, grew accustomed to their strange equipment, and were able to manœuvre so well, that they could, without a moment's hesitation, assume any attitude or make any movement they desired. Soon for a time had to be taken in tow, but he very quickly recovered his energies, and felt far more at his ease than he had been on board the junk. All sensation of sea-sickness had left him, and the relief of finding himself floating up to his waist in the sea, instead of being subject to the pitching, tossing, and heaving of a ship, was very great.

But although he was no longer ill, he was in considerable alarm. Nothing possessed him but that he should be devoured by sharks, and he was continually drawing up his legs, as though he felt them already being snapped at. His fears, it must be owned, were not altogether without foundation.

It was a strange vicissitude to which fortune had now called Kin-Fo and his companions. On and on they went, lying almost flat upon their backs to paddle, and rising to the perpendicular when they required a rest. An hour after leaving the junk the party found themselves about half a mile distant. They came to a standstill, resting

on their paddles, and began to hold a whispered consultation.

"That rascal of a captain!" said Craig, in order to broach the subject that was of course uppermost in his mind.

"And that scoundrel Lao-Shen!" added Fry.

"Are you surprised?" said Kin-Fo; "I am never surprised at anything now."

"I cannot understand how those fellows found out that you were going to take passage on board that junk," replied Craig.

"Well, it doesn't matter much now that we are safe," said Kin-Fo composedly.

"Safe!" exclaimed Craig; "we are not safe as long as the 'Sam-Yep' is in sight."

"What is to be done, then?" inquired Kin-Fo.

"We must take some refreshment and go on again, so that we may be out of sight at daybreak."

Admitting a little more air into his apparatus, Fry allowed himself to rise till the water was about level with his waist, and then opening his bag, took out a bottle and a glass. He filled the glass with brandy, and handed it to Kin-Fo, who, without requiring any pressing, drained it to the bottom. Craig and Fry helped themselves, and Soon was not forgotten.

"How are you now?" asked Craig, when Soon had emptied his glass.

"Much better, thank you," said Soon; "but I should like something to eat."

"We will have our breakfast at daybreak, and then you shall have some tea."

Soon made a wry face.

"Cold?" he asked.

"No; hot," said Craig.

Soon's countenance brightened.

"But how will you manage that?" he inquired.

"I shall make a fire."

"Then why wait till the morning?" urged Soon.

"Why, you stupid fellow, you don't want Captain Yin and his accomplices to see our light, do you?"

"No, O no."

"Then have patience, and wait till the proper time."

The appearance of the party during this colloquy was irresistibly comical; the slight undulation of the water kept them bobbing up and down like so many corks, or like the hammers of a pianoforte when the keys are touched. Kin-Fo presently remarked that the wind was beginning to freshen.

"Let us set our sails, then," said Craig and Fry.

But just as they were preparing to erect their little masts, Soon uttered a loud cry of terror.

"Be quiet, you fool!" angrily whispered his master, "do you want us to be discovered?"

"I thought," muttered Soon, "I saw a monster—a shark—quite close to me ; I thought I felt it too."

Craig carefully examined the surface of the water, and said that it was quite a mistake on Soon's part ; no shark was there at all.

Kin-Fo laid his hand on his servant's shoulder.

"Understand, Soon, that you are not to be a coward," he said. "You are not to cry out, mind, even if your leg is snapped off."

"If you make any outcry," added Fry, "we will cut a slit in your jacket, and send you to the bottom of the sea, where you may bellow to your heart's content."

Thus adjured, the unfortunate Soon, though by no means consoled, dared not utter another word. It seemed as though his troubles were never to have an end, and he began to think that the miseries of sea-sickness were scarcely worse than the tortures of terror.

Kin-Fo had been right when he said that the wind was freshening. Even if it were only one of the slight breezes that subside at sunrise, it must be utilized to increase the distance between them and the "Sam-Yep." When Lao-Shen's people discovered that Kin-Fo was no longer in his cabin, they would assuredly begin to look about for him, and if any of them were in sight, the ship's boat would greatly facilitate their capture ; consequently it was of the utmost importance to be far away before dawn.

The wind fortunately was blowing from the east. Whether they had been carried by the hurricane into the Gulf of Leao-Tong, the Gulf of Pe-Chi-Li, or even into the Yellow Sea, a westerly course must in any case take them towards the coast, where they had every chance of being picked up by some merchant vessel on its way to the mouth of the Pei-Ho, or by one of the fishing-boats plying day and night about the shore. If, on the contrary, the wind had come from the west, and the "Sam-Yep" had been driven south of Corea, Kin-Fo and his companions would have had no chance of rescue; they must either have been borne away on to the open sea, or floated ultimately on to the shores of Japan as lifeless corpses, which the dress they wore would not allow to sink.

It was now about ten o'clock. The moon would rise shortly before midnight, and there was no time to be lost. According to Craig and Fry's directions, preparations were made for hoisting sail. The process was very simple. Each gutta-percha suit had a socket attached to the sole of the right foot, which was intended to hold the short pole that served for a mast. The party first of all stretched themselves on their backs, brought their foot within reach of their hands by bending the knee, and fixed the mast in its place, having previously attached the halyard of the little sail to its extremity. At a signal from Fry and Craig, each man simultaneously pulled at his halyard, and

hoisted the upper corner of his triangular sail to the top of the mast. The halyards were then made fast to the metal waistbands, the sheets were held in the hand, and they all sailed off like a flotilla of "scaphandres," an appellation to which they had more right than the submarine workmen to whom it is often improperly applied.

In the course of ten minutes they were able to steer with perfect ease and security ; they kept equal pace with one another, and glided easily along the water like so many sea-gulls with their wings extended to the breeze. Their progress was greatly facilitated by the condition of the sea ; not a wave disturbed the long quiet undulation of its surface, so that there was no splash or surf to inconvenience them.

Two or three times, Soon, forgetting Craig and Fry's instructions, was foolish enough to turn his head, and in so doing swallowed several mouthfuls of salt water. Experience, however, soon taught him better. Still he could not overcome his dread of sharks. It was explained to him that he ran less risk in a horizontal than in a vertical position, since the formation of a shark's jaw obliges it to turn over on to its back before seizing its prey, and consequently it is difficult for it to grasp a floating object ; it was furthermore pointed out to him that these voracious brutes prefer inanimate bodies to those with any power of

motion. Soon accordingly made up his mind not to keep still for a moment, and was all the happier for his efforts.

For about an hour the "scaphandres" sailed on. A shorter time would not have sufficed to carry them out of reach of the junk, a longer would have exhausted them ; already their arms were getting weary with the strain put upon them by the tension of the sails.

Craig and Fry gave the signal for stopping. Instantly the sheets were loosened, and all, with the exception of Soon, who preferred remaining on the cautious side, resumed a perpendicular position.

"Five minutes' rest, sir," said Craig to Kin-Fo.

"And another glass of brandy," said Fry.

Kin-Fo assented willingly to both propositions. A little stimulant was all they required at present ; having dined shortly before leaving the junk, they could well afford to wait for food until the morning. Neither did they suffer at all from cold ; the layer of air between their bodies and the water protected them from any chill, and their temperature had not abated a degree since they made their start.

Was the "Sam-Yep" still in sight ? Fry carefully swept the eastern horizon with a night-glass that he drew from his bag, but no sign of her was visible against the dim background of the sky. The night was rather foggy ; there were very few stars, and the planets looked almost

like nebulæ in the firmament. The waning moon, however, would not be long in rising, and would probably disperse the mist.

“The rascals are still asleep,” said Fry.

“They haven’t taken advantage of the breeze,” said Craig.

Kin-Fo, tightening his sheet, and spreading his sail to the wind, now professed himself ready to make another start, and accordingly they all resumed their course, the wind being not quite so strong as before.

As they were proceeding towards the west, they would be unable to observe the moon as she rose in the east ; her light, however, would necessarily illuminate the opposite horizon, of which it was important for them to make a careful observation. If instead of a clearly defined circle between sea and sky, the line should be broken and refract the lunar rays, they might be certain that the shore was in sight ; and as the coast was everywhere open and unbeaten by surf, a landing could be effected without danger in almost any part.

About twelve o’clock a faint light began to play upon the vapours overhead, a sign that the moon was rising above the water. Neither Kin-Fo nor his companions turned their heads. Again the breeze had freshened, and while it helped to disperse the fog, was carrying them along with considerable rapidity, so that quite a furrow

of foam followed in their wake. The atmosphere became clearer and clearer ; the constellations shone out more brightly, and the moon, changing from a coppery red to a silvery white, soon illumined the whole of the surrounding space.

All at once Craig uttered a loud oath.

"The junk !" he cried.

"Down with the sails !" exclaimed Fry.

In an instant the four sails were lowered, and the masts removed from their sockets. All the party resumed an upright position, and looked behind them. There, too truly, was the outline of the junk, with all sails spread, about a mile away.

Captain Yin, they did not doubt, had become aware of Kin-Fo's escape, and had at once set out in pursuit. Unless the fugitives could contrive to avoid discovery on the bright surface of the water, in another quarter of an hour they would be in the hands of the captain and his accomplices.

"Heads down !" said Craig.

His order was understood. A little more air was ejected from the apparatus, and all four men sank until only their heads emerged from the waves. There they waited without a sound or a motion.

The junk was advancing rapidly, its upper sails casting great shadows on the sea. In five minutes' time it was



The uproar was terrible.

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within half a mile of them, and they could see the sailors moving to and fro, and the captain at the helm. All at once a great shout was heard ; a crowd of men had rushed upon the deck, and were apparently attacking the crew. The uproar was terrible ; yells of rage and execration alternated with shrieks of agony and despair. Then all was still ; the clamour was hushed ; nothing was heard but a constant splash, splash, at the side of the junk, indicating that bodies were being thrown overboard.

After all, then, Captain Yin and his crew had not been in league with Lao-Shen and his troop ; the poor fellows, on the contrary, had themselves been the victims of the band of rascals who had smuggled themselves on board with no other design than that of gaining possession of the junk. The pirates had had no idea that Kin-Fo was a fellow-passenger, and were he discovered now, it was certain that neither he nor any of his companions could expect to find mercy at their hands.

The "Sam-Yep" continued her course. She was close upon them now, but by the happiest chance she cast upon them the shadow of her sails. For an instant they dived beneath the waves. When they rose again, the junk had passed, and they were safe.

A corpse that was floating by they recognized as that of Captain Yin, with a poignard in his side. For a time the ample folds of his garments sustained him upon the

surface of the water. Then he sank, never to rise again.

Thus by a foul massacre had perished the genial, light-hearted commander of the "Sam-Yep."

Ten minutes later the junk had disappeared in the west, and Kin-Fo, Craig, Fry, and Soon were all alone in the waste of water.

CHAPTER XIX.

AFLOAT.

CAPTAIN BOYTON's apparatus is a gutta-percha suit, consisting of leggings, tunic, and cap. But though impervious to water, the material would not be impervious to cold, were it not that the garments are made with an outer and an inner layer between which may be admitted a certain quantity of air. This air serves the double purpose of maintaining the apparatus upon the surface of the water and preventing the chill that would otherwise ensue from long exposure.

The joints of the separate pieces of the costume are perfectly water-tight. The leggings terminate beneath the feet with heavy soles, and are clasped at the waist with a metal belt, which is made wide enough to allow free movement to the body. The jacket is fixed into the belt, and has a solid collar, to which in its turn is attached the cap, which is drawn tightly over the forehead, cheeks and chin by means of an elastic border, leaving only the eyes, mouth, and nose exposed.

"We will make a good breakfast," said Craig and Fry.

Kin-Fo gladly assented. Soon smacked his lips with delight, and for a time quite forgot his fear of being devoured.

The waterproof bag was again in requisition. Fry produced some bread and some excellent preserved meat, and the meal, though not as elaborate in its *menu* as an ordinary Chinese repast, was nevertheless most heartily enjoyed.

The bag contained provisions enough for one more day, by which time Craig and Fry said they might all hope to be on shore. Kin-Fo asked them what ground they had for such a hope? They replied that their good luck seemed to be returning to them; they were free of the dangerous junk, and never since they had had the honour of attending Kin-Fo had they been in so secure a position as now.

"All the Tai-pings in the world, sir, could not reach you here," said Craig.

"And considering that you are equivalent to two hundred thousand dollars, you float excellently well," said Fry.

Kin-Fo smiled.

"It is all owing to you, gentlemen," he said, "that I am afloat at all. Had it not been for you, I should have had the fate of poor Captain Yin."

"And so should I," echoed Soon, gulping down a huge mouthful of bread.

"You will not be the losers for your attention," Kin-Fo continued; "I shall never forget how much I owe you."

"You owe us nothing," said Craig; "we are the servants of the Centenarian."

"And our great hope is," said Fry, "that the Centenarian will never owe anything to you."

Whatever might be their motive, Kin-Fo could not be otherwise than touched by their zealous devotion.

"We will talk about this again," said he, "when Lao-Shen has restored that unfortunate letter."

Craig and Fry smiled significantly, but made no reply.

Presently, in fun, Kin-Fo asked Soon to bring him some tea.

"All right," said Fry, before Soon had time to reply to his master's joke.

Again opening his bag, he produced a little appliance which may well be reckoned an indispensable accompaniment to the Boyton apparatus, and which serves the double purpose of a lamp and a stove. It consisted simply of a tube five or six inches in length, furnished with a tap top and bottom, the whole being inserted into a sheet of cork, like the floating thermometers used in public baths.

After placing it upon the surface of the water, Fry turned

Q

on the taps, one with each hand, and in an instant a flame started from the extremity of the funnel, sufficiently large to diffuse a perceptible heat.

"There's your stove," said Fry.

Soon could not believe his eyes.

"Why, you made fire out of water!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, he made it of water and phosphuret of calcium," said Craig.

The instrument, in fact, was constructed so as to utilize a singular property of phosphuret of calcium, which in contact with water produces phosphuretted hydrogen. The gas burns spontaneously, and cannot be extinguished by either wind or rain. It is consequently employed now for lighting all the improved life-buoys, which immediately they touch the water, eject a long flame, by means of which any one who has fallen overboard by night is at once able to see the means thrown out for his rescue.¹

Whilst the hydrogen was burning, Craig held over it a little saucepan, containing some fresh water which he had drawn from a little keg, also carried in the bag. As soon as the water was boiling, he poured it into a teapot, in which a few pinches of tea had already been placed. The whole party then partook of the decoction, and even Kin-

¹ These life-buoys, which are now in use on all men-of-war, were invented by M. Seyferth and M. Silas, recorder to the French embassy at Vienna.



“There’s your stove,” said Fry.

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Fo and Soon, although it was not brewed in Chinese fashion, had no fault to find with it. It formed, in fact, a most acceptable addition to the breakfast. All that they required now was some knowledge of their whereabouts. At no distant day a sextant and chronometer will unquestionably be added to the Boyton apparatus, and then shipwrecked mariners will no longer be at a loss to ascertain their position upon the ocean.

Thus refreshed the little party once again set sail. For hours the wind blew steadily, and they rarely had to use their paddles as rudders. The gentle gliding movement in a horizontal position had a tendency to make them sleepy ; but under the circumstances sleep must not be thought of, and in order to resist it, Craig and Fry smoked cigars, after the fashion of dandies in a swimming bath.

Several times the "scaphandres" were startled by the gambols of some marine animals that put Soon into a great state of alarm ; these were nothing more, however, than harmless porpoises, probably astonished at the strange beings whom they now saw for the first time invading their native element. In great herds, they darted along with the speed of arrows, their huge slimy bodies glistening like emeralds beneath the water ; now and then leaping up some five or six feet into the air, and turning a somersault that displayed the remarkable suppleness of their muscles. So great was their speed, far surpassing that of the fleetest

ships, that Kin-Fo, in spite of the jerks and plunges, would fain have been taken in tow by one of them.

Towards noon the wind lulled into short puffs, and finally dropped altogether. The little sails fell idly against the masts; no longer was there any tension upon the sheets, nor any furrow of foam left behind in the wake.

"This is bad," said Craig.

"Very unfortunate," assented Fry.

They all came to a standstill. The masts were taken from the sockets, the sails struck, and each member of the party, having placed himself in an upright position, examined the horizon.

It was still deserted. Not a sail nor a trail of smoke was in sight. A scorching sun had absorbed all vapour and rarefied the air. The water would not have been cold for the travellers, even had they not been protected by their double covering of gutta-percha.

Sanguine as Craig and Fry might be as to the final issue of events, they could scarcely fail to be somewhat uneasy now. They had no means of judging how far they had sailed in the course of the last sixteen hours, and the non-appearance of any coast or passing vessel became more and more inexplicable. Still, neither they nor Kin-Fo were the men to despair as long as hope remained, and as they had provisions enough for another day, and the weather showed no symptoms of growing stormy, they deter-

mined to make good use of their paddles, and to push on. The signal for starting was given, and now on their backs, now on their faces, they persevered in their westerly course.

Progress was far from rapid. To arms unaccustomed to the work, the manipulation of the paddles was very fatiguing. Poor Soon was full of complaints; and he lagged so much behind the others that they frequently had to wait until he caught them up. His master scolded, abused, and threatened him, but all in vain; Soon knew that his pigtail was safe in his gutta-percha cap; still, the fear of being left behind sufficed to prevent him from falling very far into the rear.

Towards two o'clock some sea-gulls were observed, and although these birds are often seen far out at sea, their appearance could not but be taken as an indication that land was most probably within an accessible distance.

An hour later they all got entangled in a bed of seaweed, from which they had considerable trouble to extricate themselves; they floundered about like fish in a drag-net, and were obliged to use knives to set themselves free. The result was a delay of about half an hour, and an outlay of strength which could ill be spared.

At four o'clock, greatly exhausted, they made another halt. A fresh breeze had sprung up, but unfortunately it was from the south. As they could not trim their sails,

they were afraid to use them at all, lest they should be carried northwards and lose the headway they had made towards the west.

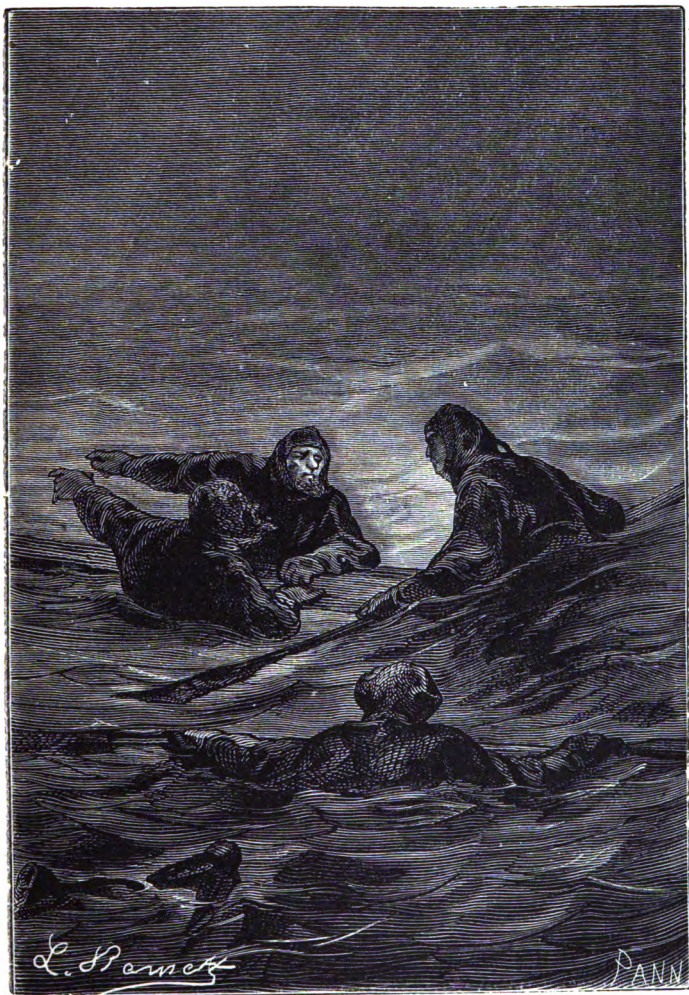
The halt was rather long, for, besides resting their weary limbs, they were glad to recruit themselves again with their provisions; but the dinner was not so festive a meal as the breakfast had been. Matters did not look quite so promising now; night was coming on; the wind was increasing from the south, and no one knew precisely what to do.

Kin-Fo leaned in gloomy silence upon his paddle, his brows knit, but more with vexation than alarm. Soon kept on grumbling and whining, and began to sneeze as though he were attacked with influenza. Craig and Fry felt that something was expected of them, but were puzzled how to act.

By a happy chance, a solution came to their bewilderment. About five o'clock, pointing suddenly towards the south, they both exclaimed,—

“A sail!”

Sure enough, about three miles to windward, a vessel was bearing down towards them, and, if she held her present course, would probably pass within a short distance of the spot where they were. Not a moment was to be lost in making their way towards her. The opportunity for deliverance must not be allowed to slip. Instantly the paddles were brought into use, and nearer and nearer drew the



“A sail!”

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vessel in the freshening breeze. It was only a fishing-smack, but it indicated that the land could not be very far distant, for the Chinese fishermen rarely venture far out to sea.

Encouraging the others to follow, Kin-Fo paddled with all his might, darting over the surface of the water like a skiff; and Soon, in his eagerness not to be left behind, worked away so hard that he fairly outstripped his master.

Half a mile more, and they would be within earshot of the boat, even if they had not already been observed. The fear was, that the fishermen, when they saw such strange creatures in the water, might take to flight. Nevertheless the attempt to reach them must be made.

The distance to be accomplished was growing considerable, when Soon, who was still in advance, gave a startling cry of terror :—

“A shark! a shark!”

And it was no false alarm. About twenty paces ahead could be seen the fins of a tiger-shark, a voracious creature peculiar to these waters, and truly worthy of its name.

“Out with your knives!” shouted Craig and Fry.

The weapons, such as they were, were quickly produced. Soon, meantime, deeming prudence the better part of valour, had beat a hasty retreat behind the rest. The shark was rapidly bearing down upon them, and for an instant his huge body, all streaked and spotted with green,

rose above the waters. It was at least sixteen feet in length, a truly hideous monster !

Turning half over on to its back, it was preparing to make a snap at Kin-Fo, who, quite calm and collected, planted his paddle on its back, and, with a vigorous thrust, sent himself flying far out of the way. Craig and Fry drew close up, ready either for attack or defence.

The shark dived for a second, and returned to the charge, its huge mouth bristling with four rows of cruel teeth. Kin-Fo attempted to repeat his former manœuvre, but this time the paddle came in contact with the creature's jaw, and was snapped off short. Half lying on its side, the shark was just rushing once more upon its prey, when the water became blood-red. Craig and Fry, with the long blades of their American knives, had succeeded in penetrating the tough skin of the brute. The hideous jaw opened and closed again with a terrible snap. The shark seemed in agonies, and began to lash the water with its formidable tail, one stroke catching Fry on his side, and dashing him ten feet away. Craig uttered a cry of pain, as if he had received the blow himself. But Fry was not hurt ; his gutta-percha covering had protected him from injury, and he returned to the attack with redoubled vigour.

The shark turned and turned again. Kin-Fo had con-



Kin-Fo had contrived to lodge the end of his broken paddle in the socket of its eye.

trived to lodge the end of his broken paddle in the socket of its eye, and, at the risk of being cut in two, managed to hold it firmly there, while Craig and Fry endeavoured to pierce the creature's heart. Their attempt was evidently successful, for almost directly the shark, with one last struggle, sank beneath the bloody waters.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted Craig and Fry, brandishing their knives in triumph.

"Thanks! thanks!" was all Kin-Fo could say.

"No thanks to us," said Craig; "two hundred thousand dollars was too good a mouthful for that brute!"

Fry cordially assented.

And where, meantime, was *Soon*? The coward, making off as fast as his paddle would carry him, had got within three cables' length of the fishing-boat; but his precaution was almost the means of his coming to grief.

The fishermen, perceiving what they supposed to be a strange animal in the water, prepared to catch it as they would a seal or a dolphin, and a long rope with a hook attached was thrown overboard. The hook caught *Soon* by the waist-belt, and slipping upwards, made a rent in his gutta-percha jacket the whole length of his back. Sustained now only by his inflated leggings, he rolled right over with his head in the water, and his heels in the air.

Kin-Fo, Craig, and Fry had by this time reached the spot, and were calling out to the fishermen in good Chinese.

Great was the alarm of the men on finding themselves accosted by what they supposed to be "talking seals." Their first impulse was to set sail and make off, but Kin-Fo at last convinced them that he was a Chinaman like themselves, and he and the two Americans were taken on board.

Soon was then turned the right way up by means of a boat-hook, and one of the fishermen caught hold of his pigtail for the purpose of hauling him on to the boat. The pigtail came off bodily in the man's hand, and down went Soon again into the water. The fishermen, by throwing a rope round his waist, succeeded, with considerable difficulty, in getting him into the boat.

Almost before he could get rid of the quantities of salt water that he had swallowed, Kin-Fo walked up to him, and said,—

"Then that pigtail of yours was false, after all?"

"Ah, yes, sir," replied Soon, "knowing your ways, I should never have ventured to enter your service with a real one."

The tone in which he spoke was so irresistibly comical, that Kin-Fo burst into a fit of laughter, in which the others joined.

The fishermen were from Foo-Ning, and were now only about five miles from the very port to which Kin-Fo wanted to go.



The pigtail came off bodily in the man's hand.

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Towards eight o'clock that evening, they were safely landed at Foo-Ning, and divesting themselves of their Boyton apparatus, once more resumed their ordinary appearance.

CHAPTER XXI.

RESIGNATION OF OFFICE.

"NOW for the Tai-ping!" were Kin-Fo's first words on the following morning, after he and his fellow-adventurers had passed a night of well-earned repose. They were now upon Lao-Shen's field of action; it was the 30th of June; matters were at a crisis. Would Kin-Fo come out conqueror in the strife? Would he have the chance of negotiating for the restoration of his letter, before Wang's ruthless agent should deal the fatal stab into his bosom?

The Americans interchanged significant glances, and re-echoed his words, "Now for the Tai-ping!"

The arrival of the party on the previous evening in their singular costume had caused a great commotion in the little port of Foo-Ning. The objects of public curiosity, they had been followed by a crowd to the door of the inn, where the money that Craig and Fry had taken the precaution to put in their bag, procured them clothes adapted for the present circumstances. Had they not been numerously

surrounded, they could hardly have failed to notice one Celestial in particular, who never left their track. Their surprise would have been considerable had they known that he was at watch all night at the inn-door, and that in the morning he was still to be found on the same spot.

Consequently there were no suspicions in their mind, when the man accosted them as they left the inn, and offered his services as a guide. He was about thirty years of age, with nothing in his appearance to indicate that he was otherwise than honest. Craig and Fry, however, cautious to the last, inquired whither he wished to guide them.

"To the Great Wall, of course," said he. "All visitors to Foo-Ning go to see the Great Wall, and as I know the country well, I thought you might accept my services to show you the way."

Kin-Fo interposed to inquire whether the country was safe for travelling. The guide assured him that it was perfectly secure.

"Do you know anything of a certain Lao-Shen hereabouts?" inquired Kin-Fo.

"O yes, Lao-Shen the Taiping," replied the guide, "but there is nothing to fear from him this side of the Wall; he will not venture to set foot on Imperial territory; he and his crew are only seen in the Mongolian Provinces."

"Where was he seen last?" asked Kin-Fo.

"In the neighbourhood of the Tchin-Tang-Ho, only a few lis from the Wall."

"And how far is it from Foo-Ning to the Tchin-Tang-Ho?"

"About fifty lis."²

"Very well; I engage you to conduct me to Lao-Shen's camp."

The man started.

"You shall be well paid," Kin-Fo added.

But the guide shook his head; he evidently did not care to pass the frontier.

"To the Great Wall," he said, "no farther. It would be at the risk of my life to go beyond."

Kin-Fo offered to pay him any sum that he pleased to demand, till at last he wrung from the man a reluctant consent to undertake the business.

Turning to the Americans, Kin-Fo told them that of course they were free to go or not, as they liked.

"Wherever you go," said Craig.

"We go also," said Fry.

The client of the Centenarian had not yet absolutely ceased to be of the value of 200,000 dollars.

The agents appeared to be perfectly well satisfied as to the trustworthiness of their guide, and to have no appre-

² About twenty-five miles.

hension of the danger which was likely to threaten beyond the great barrier that the Chinese have erected to defend themselves from the incursions of the Mongolian hordes. Soon was not consulted as to whether he wished to accompany the party or not ; go he must.

Preparations were made for starting. Neither horses, mules, nor carriages were to be procured in the little town, but there were a considerable number of camels, used by Mongolian merchants. These adventurous traders travel in caravans between Peking and Kiachta with their huge flocks of long-tailed sheep, and thus keep up a communication between Asiatic Russia and the Celestial Empire, never venturing, however, across the wide steppes, except in large and well-armed troops. They are described by M. de Beauvoir as "a fierce, proud people, who hold the Chinese in much contempt."

Five camels accordingly were purchased, together with the small quantity of harness necessary for their equipment. A stock of provisions and a supply of weapons were also procured, and the party started under the direction of their guide.

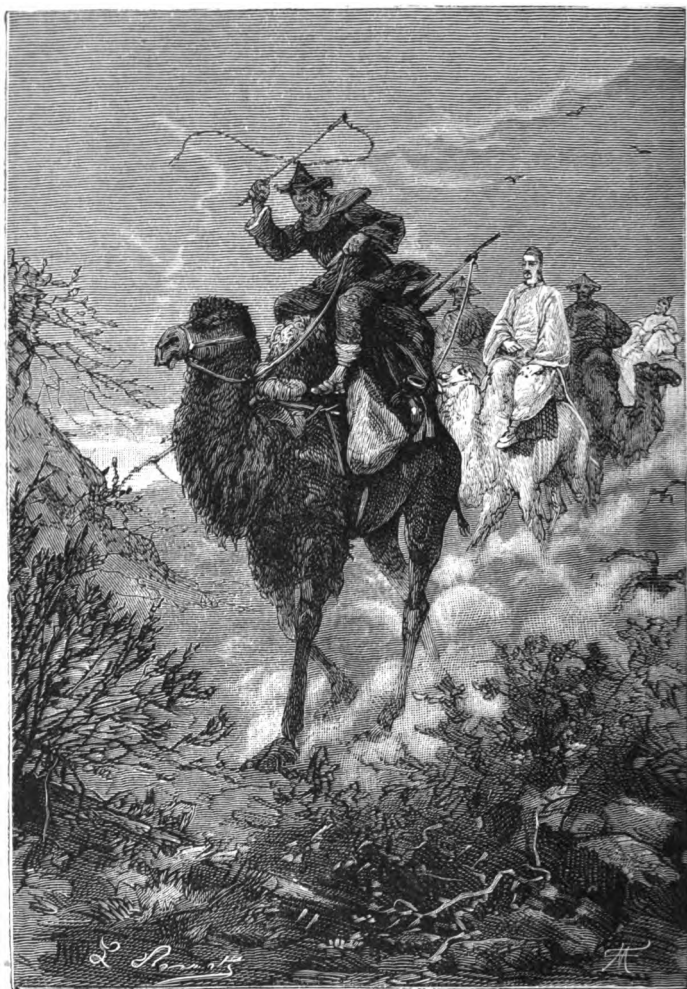
The preparations had consumed so much time, that it was one o'clock in the afternoon before they were fairly on their road. The guide, however, made sure of reaching the Great Wall by midnight, where they would make a temporary camp, and if Kin-Fo still persisted in his

determination, they would cross the frontier on the morrow.

The country about Foo-Ning was undulated, and the road, upon which the yellow dust rose in clouds, wound through richly-cultivated fields, a sign that the travellers had not yet quitted the productive territory of the Chinese Empire.

The camels marched with a slow, measured tread, each carrying its rider comfortably ensconced between its two great humps. Soon greatly approved of this mode of travelling, and thought that in this way he should not object to journey even to the world's end. The heat, however, was very great, the hot air being refracted from the soil and producing strange mirages, like vast seas, which vanished almost as suddenly as they appeared, much to the satisfaction of Soon, to whom the prospect of another sea voyage opened visions of unmitigated horror.

Though the province was situated at the extreme limit of the empire, it was by no means deserted, the overflowing population extending even to the boundaries of the Asiatic desert. Numbers of men were working in the fields, and Tartar women, distinguished by their red and blue garments, were engaged in various agricultural pursuits. Flocks of yellow sheep, with long tails that might have filled poor Soon with envy, were grazing here and there. Black eagles hovered around, and woe to the unlucky



The camels marched according to their wont, in single file.

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ruminant that should stray and fall into their clutches ! for these formidable birds of prey wage terrible war against all sheep, moufflons, and young antelopes, and are even used instead of hounds by the Kirghis of Central Asia.

Game started up from every quarter, and a gun need hardly have had a moment's rest ; though a true sportsman would scarcely have looked with a favourable eye at the nets, snares, and other contrivances worthy only of a poacher, with which the furrows between the wheat, millet, and maize were strewn.

On and on went Kin-Fo and his companions, through the clouds of dust, stopping neither at shady spots, nor at the isolated farms, nor at the villages which ever and anon could be distinguished in the distance by their memorial towers, erected to the memory of some hero of Buddhist legend. The camels marched according to their wont, in single file, their steps falling in regular cadence to the sound of a little red bell attached to their neck.

No conversation was possible under the circumstances. The guide, who seemed to be of a taciturn nature, always took the foremost place, and although the dense masses of dust materially narrowed his range of vision, he never hesitated which way to follow, even at cross roads, where there was no sign-post. Craig and Fry, quite satisfied as to his honesty, were free to direct all their attention to Kin-Fo. Naturally, as the time grew shorter, their anxiety

increased ; now or never was the time to bring them face to face with the foe they dreaded.

Kin-Fo meanwhile was forgetting all the anxieties of the present and future in making a retrospect of the past. The unintermitted evil fortune of the last two months made him feel seriously depressed. From the day that his correspondent at San Francisco sent him the news of the loss of all his fortune, had he not passed through a period of ill-luck that was truly extraordinary ? What a contrast between his existence of late, and the time when he possessed advantages which he had not the sense to appreciate ! Would misfortune terminate with his regaining possession of the letter ? Should he at last have the tender care of the sweet La-oo to compensate him for his troubles, and make him forget the difficulties by which he had been beset ? His thoughts bewildered him, and Wang, the philosopher and friend of his youth, was no longer present to comfort and advise him.

His reverie was suddenly interrupted by his camel coming so sharply in contact with that of the guide, that he was nearly thrown to the ground.

“What are you stopping for ?” he asked.

“It is eight o’clock, sir,” said the conductor, “and I propose that we halt and have our supper ; we can continue our journey afterwards.”

“But it will be dark, will it not ?” objected Kin-Fo.

"There is no fear that I shall lose my way ; the Great Wall is not more than twenty lis ahead, and we had better give our animals some rest."

Kin-Fo assented to the proposal, and the whole party came to a halt. There was a small deserted hut by the side of the road, and a little stream where the camels might be watered. It was not dark, and Kin-Fo and his companions could see to spread their meal, which they afterwards ate with an excellent appetite.

Conversation did not flow rapidly. Two or three times Kin-Fo tried to get some information about Lao-Shen, but the guide generally shook his head, evidently desiring to avoid the subject. He merely repeated that Lao-Shen himself never came on this side of the Great Wall, although he added that some of his band occasionally made their appearance.

"Buddha protect us from the Tai-ping," he concluded.

Whilst the guide was speaking, Craig and Fry were knitting their brows, looking at their watches, and holding a whispered consultation.

"Why should we not wait here quietly until to-morrow morning?" they asked presently aloud.

"In this hut!" exclaimed the guide. "Far better to be in the open country ; we shall run much less risk of being surprised."

"It was arranged that we were to be at the Great Wall

to-night," said Kin-Fo, "and at the Great Wall I mean to be."

His tone was such as to brook no contradiction, and the Americans could not do otherwise than submit. Soon, though half paralyzed with fear, dared not protest.

It was now nearly nine o'clock; the meal was over, and the guide gave the signal to start. Kin-Fo prepared to mount his camel; Craig and Fry followed him.

"Are you quite determined, sir, to put yourself into Lao-Shen's hands?"

"Quite determined," said Kin-Fo; "I will have my letter at any price."

"You are running a great risk," they pleaded, "in going to the Tai-ping's camp."

"I have come too far to retreat now," said Kin-Fo, with decision; "as I told you before, you may do as you please about following me."

The guide meantime had lighted a small pocket lantern. The Americans drew near, and again looked at their watches.

"It would be much more prudent to wait till to-morrow," they again persisted.

"Nonsense!" said Kin-Fo. "Lao-Shen will be just as dangerous to-morrow or the day after as he is to-day. My decision is unalterable. Let us be off at once."

The guide had overheard the latter part of the conversa-

tion. Once or twice previously, when Craig and Fry had been trying to dissuade Kin-Fo from proceeding, an expression of dissatisfaction had passed over his countenance, and now, when he found them persisting in their remonstrance, he could not restrain a gesture of annoyance.

The motion did not escape Kin-Fo, and he was still further surprised when the guide, as he was assisting him to mount his camel, whispered in his ear,—

“Beware of those two men.”

Kin-Fo was on the point of asking him to explain himself, but the man put his finger on his lips, gave the signal for starting, and the little caravan set off on its night journey across the country.

The guide's mysterious speech had aroused an uneasy suspicion in Kin-Fo's mind ; and yet he could not believe that, after two months' devoted attention, his two protectors were about to play him false. Yet why had they tried to dissuade him from paying his visit to the Tai-ping's camp ? Was it not for that very purpose that they had left Peking ? Was it not to their interest that Kin-Fo should regain possession of the letter that compromised his life ? Truly their conduct was inexplicable.

Kin-Fo kept to himself all the perplexity which was agitating his mind. He had taken up his position behind the guide ; Craig and Fry followed him closely, and for a couple of hours the journey was continued in silence.

It was close upon midnight when the guide stopped and pointed to a long black line in the north that stood out clearly against the lighter background of the sky. Behind the line several hill-tops had already caught the moon-light, although the moon herself was still below the horizon.

"The Great Wall!" he said.

"Shall we get beyond it to-night?" inquired Kin-Fo.

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"By all means, yes!"

"I must first go and examine the passage," said the guide. "Wait here till I come back."

The camels were brought to a standstill, and the guide disappeared. Craig and Fry stepped up to Kin-Fo.

"Have you been satisfied with our services, sir, since we have been commissioned to attend you?" they inquired in a breath.

"Quite satisfied."

"Then will you be kind enough to sign this paper as a testimonial to our good conduct during the time you have been under our charge?"

Kin-Fo looked with some surprise at the leaf torn from a note-book that Craig was holding out to him.

"It is a certificate which we hope to have the pleasure of exhibiting to our principal," added Fry.

"Here is my back to serve you as a desk," said Craig, suiting the action to the word, and stooping down.



“The Great Wall!”

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"And here is a pen and ink with which to sign your name," added Fry.

Kin-Fo smiled, and did as he was requested.

"But what is the meaning of all this ceremony at this time of night?" he asked.

"Because in a very few minutes your interest in the Centenarian Assurance Office will have expired," said Craig.

"And you may kill yourself, or allow yourself to be killed, just which you please," said Fry.

Kin-Fo stared with astonishment; the Americans were talking in the blindest of tones; but he did not at all comprehend their meaning. Presently the moon began to rise above the eastern horizon.

"There's the moon!" exclaimed Fry.

"To-day, the 30th of June, she rises at midnight," said Craig.

"Your policy has not been renewed," said Fry.

"Therefore you are no longer the client of the Centenarian," added Craig.

"Good-night, sir," said Fry politely.

"Good-night," echoed Craig, with equal courtesy.

And the two agents, turning their camels' heads in the opposite direction, disappeared from view, leaving Kin-Fo in speechless amazement.

The sound of their camels' hoofs had scarcely died away,

when a troop of men, led on by the guide, seized upon Kin-Fo, helpless to defend himself, and captured Soon, who was rushing away in the hope of making his escape.

An instant afterwards, both master and man were dragged into the low chamber of one of the deserted bastions of the Great Wall, the door of which was at once fastened behind them.

CHAPTER XXII.

BACK TO SHANG-HAI.

THE Great Wall of China, constructed by the Emperor Tin-Chi-Hooang-Ti in the third century, is nearly 1400 miles long, and extends from its two jetties in the Gulf of Leao-Tong to the province of Kan-Soo, where it degenerates into very insignificant dimensions. It is an uninterrupted succession of double ramparts, defended by bastions fifty feet high and twenty wide ; the lower part is of granite, the upper of bricks, and it boldly follows the outline of the mountain tops on the Russo-Chinese frontier. On the Chinese side the wall is now in a very bad condition, but on the side facing Manchuria it is still well preserved, and its battlements maintained in formidable array.

Neither army nor artillery defends this line of fortification ; Russian, Tartar, Kirghis, as much as the Chinaman, is free to pass its barrier ; and the wall, moreover, fails to protect the Empire from the visitation of the fine Mongolian dust which the north wind brings down sometimes as far as the capital.

After passing a miserable night on a heap of straw, Kin-Fo and Soon were next morning forced to take their way beneath the postern of these deserted bastions. They were escorted by a band of twelve men, who no doubt were in Lao-Shen's service. The guide who had hitherto conducted them had disappeared ; it became more and more plain that it had been design and not chance that had thrown him in their way ; the rascal's hesitation about venturing beyond the Great Wall was a mere *ruse* to avert suspicion ; and he too beyond a question had been acting under the orders of the Tai-Ping.

"Of course you are taking me to Lao-Shen's camp?" Kin-Fo said to the leader of the escort.

"We shall be there in little more than an hour," answered the man.

It was a confirmation to Kin-Fo's conjecture, of which he did not stand in much need ; yet it satisfied him. After all, was he not being conducted to the very place for which he had set out ? and was he not in the way to get the chance of recovering the paper that kept his life in jeopardy ? He maintained his composure perfectly, leaving all outward exhibition of alarm to poor Soon, whose teeth were chattering with the most abject fear.

Beyond the wall, the troop did not continue its journey along the great Mongol road, but diverged at once into a steep pathway to the right through the mountainous



With the utmost calmness Kin-Fo passed through the double row they formed.

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district of the province, the guard so carefully surrounding their prisoners that any attempt to escape, even had they been inclined to venture it, would have been out of the question.

Their advance was as rapid as the steepness of the road would allow, and in about an hour and a half, on turning the corner of a projecting eminence, they came in sight of a building in a half-ruined condition ; it was an old bonze-house built upon the brow of a hill, and a curious monument of Buddhist architecture. It did not seem at all likely that any worshippers would now be found to frequent a temple in such a deserted part of the frontier ; but it was a situation not badly suited for a highwayman, and if Lao-Shen had settled there, he had made a judicious selection for himself.

In reply to a question of Kin-Fo, the leader of the escort told him that it was Lao-Shen's residence.

"Take me to him at once," said Kin-Fo.

"We have brought you on purpose," answered the man.

Having been deprived of their fire-arms, Kin-Fo and Soon were brought into a wide vestibule that had formed the atrium of the ancient temple. Here were about twenty fierce-looking men, all armed and attired in the picturesque costume of highwaymen. With the utmost calmness, Kin-Fo passed through the double row they formed on his entrance ; Soon having to be pushed forcibly by his shoulders.

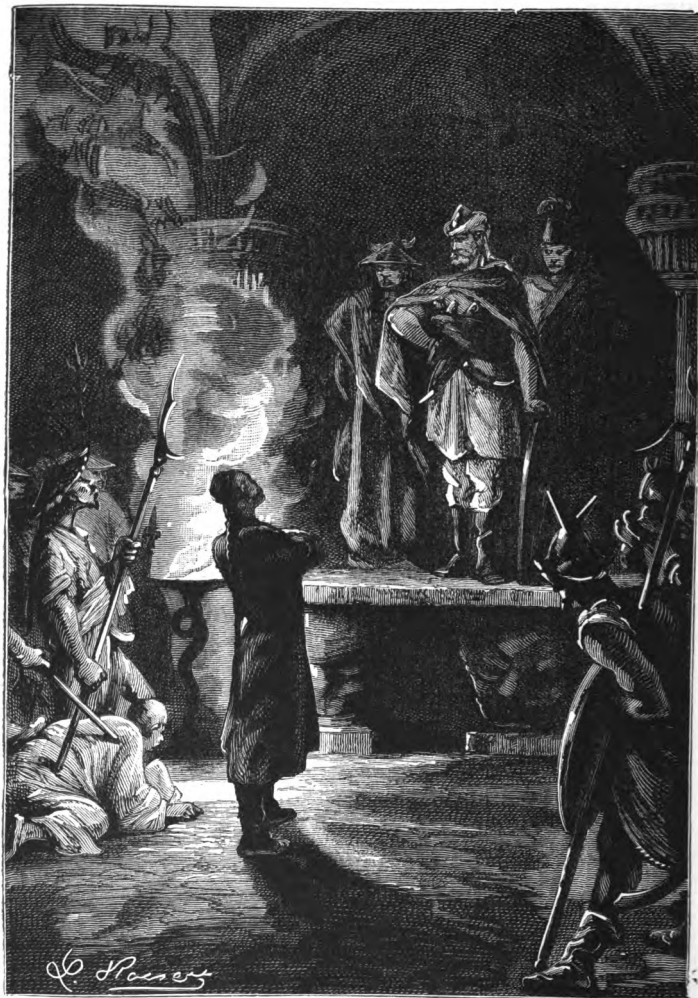
The farther end of the vestibule opened on to a staircase cut in the solid wall, and leading into the heart of the mountain to a crypt beneath the temple by windings so complicated that no one unaccustomed to the place could have found his way.

Lighted by torches carried by the escort, the prisoners were conducted down thirty steps, then for about a hundred yards along a narrow passage, until they found themselves in a large hall, which the additional glare of more torches still left very dim. Massive pillars carved with grotesque heads of the monsters of Chinese mythology supported the low arches of the roof, which sprang from their keystones with spreading mouldings.

A low murmur that ran through the hall made Kin-Fo aware that it was not deserted; so far from that, its recesses were filled with men, as if the entire confraternity of Tai-pings had been summoned to some special ceremony.

At the extreme end of the crypt, on a wide stone platform, stood a man of enormous stature; he bore all the appearance of a president of some secret tribunal; three or four attendants stood close beside him, as if acting the part of his assessors, and at a sign from him they gave orders that the prisoners were to approach.

"Here is Lao-shen," said the leader, pointing to the gigantic figure on the platform.



"I am Kin-Fo."

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Stepping forward with firm step, Kin-Fo in the most direct manner entered upon the business that was uppermost in his mind.

"I am Kin-Fo," he began. "Wang has been your old comrade and confederate. I gave Wang a certain paper with a certain contract. Wang has transferred that paper to you. I come to tell you that that contract is not valid now, and I demand the paper at your hands."

The Tai-ping did not stir a muscle; had he been of bronze he could not have been more rigid.

"You can demand your own price," continued Kin-Fo, and then waited for an answer.

But no answer came.

Kin-Fo went on,—

"I am ready to give you a draft on any bank you choose. I am prepared to guarantee its payment to any messenger you send. Name the sum for which you surrender the contract."

Still no answer.

Kin-Fo repeated his request more emphatically than before.

No answer.

"Five thousand taels, shall I offer?"

Still silence.

"Ten thousand?"

Lao-Shen and all around him were as mute as the statues.

Kin-Fo grew anxious and impatient.

"Do you not hear me?"

Lao-Shen bowed his head gravely.

"I will give you thirty thousand taels. I will give you all you would get from the Centenarian. I must have the paper. Name, only name the price."

The Tai-Ping stood mute as before.

Wild with excitement Kin-Fo clenched his hands and dashed forwards to the platform.

"What price will you take?"

"Money will not buy that paper," at last said the Tai-ping sternly; "you have offended Buddha by despising the life that Buddha gave you; and Buddha will be avenged. Death alone can convince you of the worth of the gift of life which you have esteemed so lightly."

The voice with which this sentence of decision was uttered prohibited any reply; and even had Kin-Fo been anxious to say a word in his own defence, the opportunity was not afforded him. A signal was given, and he was forthwith seized, carried out, and thrust into a cage, the door of which was immediately locked. In spite of the most pitiable howlings, Soon was subjected to the same treatment.

"Ah, well!" said Kin-Fo to himself, when he was left to his solitude, "I suppose those who despise life deserve to die!"

Yet death was not so near as he imagined. Hours passed on and execution was delayed ; he began to speculate what terrible torture the Tai-ping might have in store for him. After a while he was conscious that his cage was being moved, and he felt that it was being placed upon some vehicle. Evidently he was to be conveyed to a distance. For nearly eight hours there was the tramp of horses, and the clatter of weapons carried by an escort, and he was tumbled and jolted about most unmercifully. Then came a halt. Shortly afterwards the cage was removed to another conveyance ; it was not long before it began rolling and pitching ; there was the noise, too, of a screw, and the ill-fated tenant was aware that he was on board a steamer.

“Are they going to throw me overboard?” he wondered ; “well, it will be a mercy if they spare me any worse torture!”

Forty-eight hours elapsed. Twice a day a little food was introduced into the cage by a trap-door, but he never could see the hand that brought it, and never could get a reply to the questions that he asked.

He had plenty of time to think now. He had been years and years and felt no emotion ; surely he was not destined to die without emotion ; he had had enough and more than enough during the last few weeks ; he must die now, but he had the intensest longing to die in the light

of day ; he shuddered at the prospect of being cast unawares into the deep sea ; oh, that he could live, if it were only to see once more his beloved La-oo ! To see her no more ; the thought was terrible !

The voyage came to an end ; he was yet alive ; but surely his last moments must have come ; here was the crisis ; every minute was a year,—a hundred years !”

To his unbounded surprise, he felt his cage carried along and deposited upon *terra firma* ; he heard a commotion outside, and in a few minutes the door was opened ; he was seized, and a bandage fastened tightly over his eyes, and he was pushed violently along. Finding after a time that the steps of the men who were driving him along began to hesitate, he concluded that they had arrived at the scene of his execution, and shouted out,—

“Hear my last petition. I have but one request ; unbandage my eyes ; let me see the daylight ; let me die as a man that can face death !”

“Grant the criminal the boon he asks,” said a solemn voice, severely, in his ears ; “let the bandage be untied.”

The bandage was removed.

Kin-Fo quivered with amazement. Was he dreaming ? What was the meaning of all this ?

Before him was a table sumptuously spread. Five guests were smiling, as if they were expecting his arrival. Two seats were still unoccupied.

"Friends, friends!" he cried in the bewilderment of his excitement; "tell me, am I mad?"

A few moments restored him to composure, and he looked around; there was no mistake; before his eyes were Wang and the four friends of his early youth, Yin-Pang, Hooal, Pao-Shen, and Tim, with whom just two months previously he had feasted in the cabin of the yacht on the Pearl River at Canton. Here he was in the dining-room of his own yamen at Shang-Hai.

"Speak, Wang, and tell me," he cried, "what means all this? Is it you or your ghost?"

"It is Wang himself," replied the philosopher, smiling.

Kin-Fo looked puzzled. Wang then went on,—

"You have come home again after a rough lesson. You owe that lesson to me. It has been my doing that you have had so much to bear. But it has been for your good, and you must forgive me."

More perplexed than ever, Kin-Fo looked at him, but said nothing.

"All," proceeded Wang, "is soon explained. I undertook, at your solicitation, the task of putting you to death, just in order that the commission should not be given to other hands. I knew sooner than even you did, that the report about your ruin and the loss of your property was all false; and I knew, in consequence, that though you then wanted to die, you would very soon want to live. I

have made my former comrade, Lao-Shen, my confidant. Lao-Shen is now one of the most faithful of the friends of the government ; he has long since submitted to established rule ; but in this affair he has co-operated with me ; and your own experience of the last few days tells you how ; he has brought you face to face with death, and thus has taught you the lesson I determined you should learn of the value of life. My heart bled for you at the trouble and the suffering you had to endure ; it was a hard and bitter thing to me to abandon you to what you would have to undergo ; but I knew there was no other, no easier way in which you could be made successful in the pursuit of happiness."

Wang could say no more. Kin-Fo had caught him in his arms, and was pressing him to his heart.

"Poor Wang!" he said, "what pain you have suffered on my account! And besides, what risks you have run! I shall never forget that day at the Bridge of Palikao."

The philosopher laughed, almost merrily.

"Yes ; it was a cold bath for any one ; but, for a man of fifty-five, in a burning sweat after a long chase, it was rather a trial both for his years and for his philosophy. But never mind, no harm came of it. A man never moves so quickly as when he is doing good for others."

"For others," repeated Kin-Fo ; "yes, I do not doubt

it; the true secret of happiness is to be working for the good of others."

The conversation, which was becoming grave, was interrupted by the introduction of Soon. The poor fellow was looking as miserable as might be expected after a sea-voyage of nearly two days; it would be difficult to describe exactly the hue of his complexion, but he expressed himself unboundedly glad to find himself in his master's home again.

After releasing Wang from his embrace, Kin-Fo went round and affectionately shook hands with each one of the guests.

"What a fool I have been all my life!" he said.

"But you are going to be a perfect sage henceforth," replied Wang.

"My first act of wisdom, then," Kin-Fo began, "must be to set my affairs in order. I shall not be content until I have that little document again in my possession which has been the cause of all my tribulations. If Lao-Shen is in possession of it, he must give it up, in case it should fall into unscrupulous hands."

There was a general smile.

"Our friend's adventures," said Wang, "have most undoubtedly wrought a change in his character; he is no longer the indifferent mortal he was."

"But you do not tell me," persisted Kin-Fo, "where

that written contract is; nothing can satisfy me till I have seen it burnt, and its ashes scattered to the winds."

"You seem in earnest," said Wang.

"Most seriously," replied Kin-Fo; "but where is the paper? Has Lao-Shen given it back?"

"Lao-Shen never had it."

"Then you have it yourself; you will not refuse to restore it to me? I suppose you do not want to retain it as a guarantee against a repetition of my folly."

"Certainly not," said Wang; "but it is not in my possession; still more, it is not at my disposal."

"What!" cried Kin-Fo; "you do not mean that you have been imprudent enough to entrust it to other hands?"

"I confess I have parted with it," Wang replied.

"How? why? when? to whom?" exclaimed Kin-Fo in his impatience.

"I gave it up—" continued Wang calmly.

"To whom? tell me," interrupted Kin-Fo.

"You do not give me time to tell you; I gave it up to one who is willing to restore it to you?"

And almost before he had finished speaking, La-oo stood in front of him, holding the paper in her delicate fingers. Concealed behind a curtain, she had heard all that passed, and delayed no longer to come forward.



La-oo stood in front of him.

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"La-oo!" cried Kin-Fo, and was hastening to clasp her to his bosom.

But she drew back, as if she were going to retreat as mysteriously as she had appeared.

"Patience, patience!" she said, "business before pleasure; does my brother know and acknowledge his own hand-writing?"

"Too well," he answered; "there is not the second fool in the world who ever would have written it."

"Is that your real opinion?" she asked.

"My real opinion," said Kin-Fo.

"Then you may burn the paper," said La-oo; "and therewith annihilate the man who wrote it."

With the most beaming of smiles she handed him the paper which so long had been the torture of his life; he held it to a candle, not removing his eyes from it until it was consumed.

Then turning to his promised bride, he pressed her lovingly to his bosom.

"And now," he said, "you will come and preside at our re-union here. I feel as if I can do justice to the feast."

"And so do we," rejoined the guests.

A few days later and the term of the court-mourning had expired. With even greater lavishness than before the ceremony was arranged, and the marriage took place immediately.

The affection of the loving couple was unalterable ; prosperity awaited them throughout their future life ; and only by a visit to the yamen in Shang-Hai could the measure of their mutual happiness be realized.

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